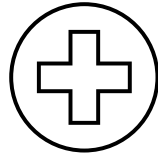


(Title Page)

GOOD NEWS PREACHING



AND THE OPEN BIBLE LECTIONARY

JAMES R. CHAMBLEE, JR.

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DEDICATION

To Mary Lou, who cheerfully and gamely went with me to live and work in five towns of which neither of us had ever heard and in three metropolitan way stations of which everyone has heard; sometimes fulfilling her own professional career and always quickly becoming in every place the best-loved friend and servant of God, family, church, colleagues, community, and world.

PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thankfully recognize the patient and impatient help of the members of the congregations that I have served as pastor, especially those congregants who thoughtfully and lovingly affirmed or criticized my preaching efforts. They are Presbyterian churches in Oklahoma: Woodward, Watonga, Pawhuska, El Reno, and Elk City; and in Kansas: Smith Center. I also gained valuable experience in the dynamics of professional church staff relations as an associate pastor at Madison Square Presbyterian, a central city church in San Antonio, and at John Calvin Presbyterian, a suburban church in Dallas, under the tutelage of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Terry in the first instance and the Rev. Dr. William Baine in the second. My commitment to biblical expository preaching was affirmed and strengthened by the fact that both of my overseers were serious expositors of the Bible in their preaching.

My nephew Jeff Ploger has read my manuscript at stages along the way and made helpful comments and suggestions, one of which I mention in the Preface. Jeff's paper on John Duns Scotus (1265/66-1308) prompted me to have another look at the meaning and history of medieval scholasticism among Christian theologians just as Knitter 2009 had prompted me to have another go at reading Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* which led to a new appreciation of Tillich's philosophical stance in ontology and his methodological kinship with the medieval schoolmen. These two prompts together led to significant improvements in this work.

Four professional colleagues, of whom I have long since lost track, influenced me with constructive insights, personal help, encouragement, and friendship during the earliest and most formative times of my preaching career, thus helping to make this book better than it could have been without their influence. They are:

Ray Harrison gave me the idea that the time pressures of pastoral ministry should lead us

to read the seminal theologians of our time and of history, and resort to secondary writers and “practical helps” only as necessary to help us conceptually when we struggle to comprehend the heavy-duty thinkers. I have followed that guideline consistently in my selection of scripture commentaries for sermon preparation purposes, but not so much in my general theological reading diet. Ray also helped me begin learning to surrender control and find peace in a personal crisis with the simple words “Jim, you can do this if Jesus Christ is real to you.”

Bob Thayer introduced me to Friedrich Schleiermacher’s idea of faith experience as a sense of complete dependence upon God for the continued ability to think, feel, believe, hope, and act in constructive ways, an attitude of dependence the maintenance or restoration of which is one of the purposes of scripture reading, prayer, study, service, fellowship, worship and preaching. While Karl Barth and others have rejected some of Schleiermacher’s concepts as an undue psychologizing of Christian faith, I note that the obverse of a sense of dependence on God is a sense of self-sufficiency or independence from God, the sin of pride. I later discovered that Paul Tillich 1951, 15, 41-42, effectively discounts the “psychologizing” critiques of Schleiermacher’s definition of the essence of Christian faith as a misunderstanding of Schleiermacher’s use of the word feeling. Bob also introduced me to the importance of studying to release self-expression in writing and in public speaking, as distinct from cobbling together a message or report with a bundle of well or poorly arranged paraphrases and quotations from sources. That is, I took self-expression to mean finding my own thoughts and words about connections between text, common experience, and present situation, being unaware at that time of what a loaded term self-expression is in both modern philosophy and homiletic theology. I discuss self-expression further in Book II, n. 21.

Ray Stratton saw to it that I and my family had opportunities and took time from busy

work schedules for regular social life with other young families of like interests during the critical early years of professional ministry and family development. Ray, who was Chaplain at the Western State Hospital in Fort Supply, Oklahoma in the 1960's, also provided me and other area ministers with opportunities for something like clinical pastoral training by way of seminars with visiting consultants and opportunities of volunteer chaplaincy work at the hospital.

Harry Willson is a kindred spirit whom I met in Albuquerque at a 1965 conference on "The Changing Southwest" that he had organized. I discovered that Harry had resolved about the same time as I to concentrate on preaching expository sermons in Bible book series, so that we affirmed each other in that resolve. That commitment to and experience in *lectio continua de scriptura* expository preaching was a major factor in equipping and impelling me to begin renovating the three-year lectionaries for my own use in preaching and worship leadership.

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PREFACE

The typescript for this volume was developed during the past fifty years in the reverse of the order presented here. First came *The Open Bible Lectionary* which is now Book II. Then came *Good News Preaching* in the form of appendixes to *The Open Bible Lectionary* but now in the form of the chapters of Book I.

It was in 1975 that I became so dissatisfied with the many discontinuities and deficiencies in the order, consistency, and homiletic adaptabilities of the 3-year lectionaries that I began to do my own renovating, first by making the years on Matthew, Mark, and Luke respectively stay with those Gospels for all the Sundays of the year. That of course led to the need of developing a year on the Gospel of John since I had cancelled even the slighting nod to John in the three-year lectionaries by making the synoptic Gospel years consistent. Next came the need to devote part of each year to preaching continuous sermon series on an Epistle and part of each year to preaching continuous series on a book of the Old Testament. Then came the need for more than one half-year on each Gospel to make the canonical coverage comprehensive. And one thing led to another until after about 30 years of casting valuables donated by biblical, liturgical, historical, and homiletic theologians into my slow-burning fire, out came *The Open Bible Lectionary*. Meanwhile, the need arose for several appendixes to *The Open Bible Lectionary* to discuss matters of canon, including contemporary canonical studies, and new developments in textual hermeneutics generally and biblical hermeneutics in particular, modern/postmodern perspectives in philosophy, systematic theology, general historiography, biblical historiography, homiletic theology, liturgical theology, and the history of preaching in Christian worship.

Eventually, my burgeoning notes in the appendixes grew to the point where it seemed reasonable to move the appendixes to the front of the book as chapters and let the expanded

lectionary bring up the rear since a work in which the appendixes make up more than half of the volume would be out of balance. I consulted my nephew, Jeffrey K. Ploger, a musician, active church person and retired accountant who has made an avocational career of scholarly research and writing in music history and the history of Christian doctrine, and who has kindly read my manuscript at stages along the way, and he agreed that such a major rearrangement was in order, partly because, as he stated, there is a lot more scholarly substance in the former appendixes now chapters than in my expanded lectionary. I know that Jeff is correct about where the most scholarly substance is since the former appendixes now chapters consist of my reading notes from the world of modern and postmodern perspectives in philosophy, historiography, biblical hermeneutics, homiletic theology, liturgical theology, systematic doctrinal theology, and the history of preaching in Christian worship, more or less artfully arranged with occasional summary captions and including many quotes and paraphrases from the masters. But I also know that the Open Bible Lectionary represents more of my own original work and creation. So, I threw my bucket of donated valuables along with my own hand-crafted jewels back into the smoldering coals and out came *Good News Preaching: Tradition, Interpretation, Proclamation, Celebration* as Book I with *The Open Bible Lectionary: A Plan for All Seasons* as Book II. God grant that this golden calf be used in the publication of glad tidings by some preachers and their congregations sometime somewhere but not idolized by any people anytime anywhere.

Book I

GOOD NEWS PREACHING:

TRADITION
SCRIPTURE, CHURCH TEACHING

INTERPRETATION
BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS, THEOLOGY

PROCLAMATION
GOOD NEWS PREACHING

CELEBRATION
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

**Notes from the World of Biblical Hermeneutics, Historiography,
Philosophy, Theology: biblical, canonical, constructive,
doctrinal, homiletic, liturgical, philosophical,
process, relational, systematic; and
The History of Preaching in Christian Worship**

BOOK I INTRODUCTION

(Works referenced in this volume by author and date are listed with full publication data in the General Bibliography.)

During the last half of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first century there has been a great flurry and ferment of rethinking about the work of Christian preaching, including much productive writing and teaching in the areas of biblical hermeneutics, homiletic theology, liturgical theology, the theory and practice of oral communication, the nature of biblical history and general historiography, and a reexamination of various ways of Christian preaching and approaches to the development and structuring of sermons. This great stirring has been occasioned and augmented in part by:

- The development of a newer textual hermeneutic in general literary and historical studies.
- A reclaiming of the narrative character of the Bible, seen in the Old Testament record of the communal memory of God's purposes and actions with the people of Israel, and in the communal memory of the life and work of Jesus Christ and that of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.
- A new understanding of the primacy of the spoken word in human language and of the oral-aural character of recital in the Old Testament Hebrew festivals and in the oral-aural character of preaching in the Christian assembly in the New Testament record and in subsequent Christian history.
- An awareness of the changed and changing social dynamic of how people hear public address and what sort of speech in what sort of venues and cultural contexts may be attended with respect and used by people in modern/postmodern society to create meaning and new directions in their own lives and their communities.
- A heightened consciousness of the symbolic character of all language and

communication and of the coexistence of symbolic, cultural, evaluational, spiritual, and subjective views of the world of human experience along with a dominant and pervasive scientific, empirical, and objective view of the material world as it is.

- A newly expanded and more widely disseminated awareness of the necessary use of inference in the writing of general history, and in the work of the biblical writers - people of faith who wrote from the perspective of their experience of God and of the divine presence and action in the world, including the oral transmission of the storied memories of their faith communities.
- A new and vibrant round of interdenominational conversation around liturgical and homiletic practice instigated and spurred on by the work and product of the Second Ecumenical Council convened in a series of meetings around the world by the Vatican in the early nineteen sixties.
- A belated recognition that the honored tradition among the Black churches in North America of ending every sermon on a rising note of celebration should be claimed and implemented in all Christian preaching of whatever cultural hue for reasons that should have been obvious from the very beginning: “preach gospel” means literally the same as “publish glad tidings.” Even the most formal of church liturgies usually end with an upbeat hymn and a spoken commission to go out in joy and peace to live a renewed life of love, service, and witness in every aspect of our life in the world; and a pastoral/priestly bene-diction (good-word) or blessing. As a practical matter, the execution of these formal liturgical structures of concluding the service in a renewed vision of hope and purpose can seem forced and perfunctory if the sermon has not ended on a rising note of celebration flowing strongly from the joy of the gospel that

transparently inhabits the hearts of pastor and people and the heart of the sermon that they have wrought together. If the tone or the content of the sermon makes the hearer wonder where the glad is in these tidings, it just might not be good news preaching. Thus, it is urgent that every sermon have the substantive content and emotional mood of good news that makes people free and strong to handle the bad news; and the ultimate tone and import of comfort and rejoicing.

Now for a few words about the two subtitles of Book I. First subtitle (Tradition, Interpretation, Proclamation, Celebration): There are three main actions that should take place when the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached from the Bible in the context of Christian worship: *Interpretation* of the *Tradition* according to scripture and historic church teaching, the *Proclamation* of the glad tidings for all people through God's gift of the continuing life of Jesus as the Christ in church and world, and *Celebration* of our renewed life of faith, hope, love, service, and spiritual communion with God, nature, convivial immediate communities and the cosmopolitan community of all people. (Irizarry 2024, 11 17, uses convivial and cosmopolitan in a similar way in his discussion of the church's challenges in relation to the current hyper rate of cultural change) But there is one activity, in addition to constancy in prayer, that must precede, pervade, and follow all three of those actions (interpretation, proclamation, celebration), not only in the worship service where those actions have public expression, but also in all of the preacher's and the congregation's work of sermon development and preaching preparation, and that activity is *conversation*. So, how does conversation take place during sermon development and preaching preparation, in the moment of preaching, and after the preaching? Conversation takes place when preachers are engaged in table fellowship, work and service activities, pastoral

care, and study and discussion sessions with their congregants and colleagues, their families, small groups in their churches, and various kinds of cultural and service organizations and interest groups in their larger communities. Conversation takes place when congregants (they are participants in sermon development and sermon preaching) are engaged in those same ways and venues whether the lead preacher is present or not. In addition to those ways of conversation, there is also a kind of virtual conversation that goes on in the individual study and thought lives of pastors and congregants as they respond in mental dialogue with the content creators behind all of their reading, study, viewing and hearing in every kind of public communication medium. It is through all of these types and ways of conversation that pastors and congregants come to make meaningful connections between the content and context of the good news message from the Bible and the realities and experiences of their life and their world in the here and now. There are some hopeful ways in which such conversation has been enlivened and endowed with a new urgency and relevance in recent decades, the concurrent decline of religious participation in many parts of the world notwithstanding.

Second subtitle (Notes from the World of ...): Perhaps the following “Notes from the World of Biblical Hermeneutics, Historiography, Philosophy, and Theology: biblical, canonical, constructive, doctrinal, homiletic, liturgical, philosophical, process, relational, systematic; and The History of Preaching in Christian Worship” may prove useful to some lead preachers (the whole congregation preaches the sermon; the person in the pulpit is the *lead* preacher). For example, some lead preachers may find help here in building, augmenting, curtailing, or reordering their list of books waiting in line to be taken up in the daily theological reading hour that is necessary for lead preachers to get their theological thinking muscle up and moving and kept in fit condition to be active in the background sifting and sorting through the thoughts and

connections that are essential to sermon development. That theological thinking muscle must be active in the background all through the day during every kind of work, rest, and play, but not in the anxious ruminating kind of way that can only lead to burnout. The daily early morning hour of theological reading can get that muscle started for the day and then put it on autopilot or muscle memory to do its job all through the day with the lead preacher free to focus consciously on other matters yet be ready and able to take over the manual controls when needed.

CHAPTER I

Canon and Communal Faith History:

The Selection of Preaching Texts and the Use of Lectionaries

[¶1] **The paradox of the Christian scriptural canon: a fixed entity that coexists with and participates in a continuing canonical process in history until now.**

I use the word canon in the Introduction of Book II, The Open Bible Lectionary, in the narrow or static sense of a list of authoritative writings that are included in the church's authorized scriptures as distinguished from those that are not included and which lack such authority. There, in Section c., Article 3, I assert that the passages of scripture that are neglected in the Revised Common Lectionary "are part of the canon of authoritative scripture"...and that "there should be an intention to interpret as much of canonical scripture as possible in preaching over time and throughout the church universal." But in the light of contemporary canonical studies, especially the work of James Sanders in developing a model called canonical criticism, I might have written that the passages that are neglected in the three-year lectionaries are part of a vibrant and continuing canonical process in which believing communities keep the canon of Scripture alive by continually and consistently reading and preaching and teaching and resignifying or repurposing these texts in terms of current community needs, issues, and situations, in communal worship and education as well as in individual and family devotional life and spiritual nurture; and that the passages that are not scheduled for reading and preaching in the lectionaries should be considered open and available for the church's use, which, of course, they are, but only technically so. I refer or allude to the perspectives of canonical criticism several times in this

Chapter, and I discuss it more extensively in Chapter II.

[¶ 2] **The word canon and the concept of a canon of religious scripture have had a varied and uneven development in the course of Jewish and Christian history.**

Vermes 2004, 17, notes that at the desert community of Essene Jews documented in the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1945, “the concept of ‘Bible’ was still hazy, and the ‘canon’ open-ended.” Barr 1983, 49, discusses some ways that the word canon has been used and abused and some issues of Old Testament canon, and 1999, 429, discusses some of his arguments with Brevard S. Childs regarding hermeneutical implications of canon. James Sanders 1984, 8-17, discusses many complexities and ambiguities around the highly fluid processes related to the notion of a canon of the Hebrew scriptures during the years between 70 and 100 C.E., including the discussions at meetings held in Jamnia, and the extensive reassessment of previously held ideas required by the discovery and analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other modern archaeological findings at various sites of ancient Jewish communities. He observes that not only was the formal concept of canon absent, but that due to sectarian and language differences across those communities the Hebrew text itself was for a long time unsettled. Dargan 1904, 39f, 66, notes the natural coincidence of the settling of the New Testament canon (with the Old Testament canon assumed by the church even if a Hebrew Bible canon was not yet officially settled by the Jews) with the culmination of the early church’s preaching in the fourth century. Ritschl 1963, 25-78, discusses the meaning of Scriptural canon and authority for the church’s proclamation, and he contrasts the Protestant and Roman Catholic understandings of Scripture and tradition. N. T. Wright 2005, 119, observes that tradition is a good guide as to where the church has been in Christian teaching but that Scripture is a better guide as to where the church

should go. He also, 2006, 175-190, provides a clear and balanced and elementary discussion of the history and significance of the Jewish and Christian scriptural canons, noting that while Christians are called to become part of their own controlling story contained in the Christian Bible, that doesn't mean that the God who is the master of all he has created as well as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—God and Father of our Master Teacher and Savior Jesus the Christ—has nothing to say through anyone else's scriptures. Deiss 1976, 87-96, gives a straightforward yet critical presentation of the formation of the canon of scripture.

[¶3] **The books, made of papyrus leaves, discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945 sparked new study of the role of the early church spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, and the influence of the gnostic worldview of the dominant Greek culture on the process of canonical inclusion and exclusion during the early centuries of Christianity.**

James Sanders 1972 and 1984 discusses how formative story and collective memory function in religious communities and how a fixed canon of authoritative writings comes into being and how old canons get augmented by new canons as communities respond to changing circumstances. Dodd 1958 (first published 1929), 299, also discusses the fluidity of canons, how once established they must be continually updated with interpretations through commentary, teaching, and preaching. Brueggemann 2003, xi-27, discusses how canon develops and operates in faith communities, and he calls that development and operation “the traditioning process” and describes it as a process of “imaginative remembering.” Craddock 2011, 57, acknowledges that all of our preaching is a telling again or “traditioning” (quote marks are his) of the gospel that we have received. Dodd 1958 (first published 1929), viii (Preface to Second Edition 1938), 196, takes the canon of Scripture for granted, averring that it was not arbitrarily imposed but shaped itself out of the course of events, a rather sanguine estimation of events compared to the

perspective that Pagels 1989 provides by reviewing the writings of the early church orthodox theological teachers, aka fathers, alongside the gnosis infused Christian writings that they excluded from the canon. Pagels 2003 again reviews the history of the church's canonization of scripture, noting particularly the influence of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, and the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) under the influence of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Dodd, of course, was not aware in 1929 of the papyrus book manuscripts (not animal skin scrolls) discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. But he and other modern biblical scholars were certainly aware before 1945 of the source documents in Greek from which the Nag Hammadi codices were translated into Coptic and which were circulating among some of the Christian churches during the early centuries when the canon was being shaped and sorted out, even though only a small number of those Greek manuscripts were still extant in the twentieth century. The word Coptic has the same Greek root—*Aigypaios*—as the word Egypt. But, here, Coptic refers to a written language that uses the *Greek* alphabet to phonetically represent the common spoken language of ancient Egypt, distinct from the picture writing—hieroglyphics (hieros = sacred, glyphein = to carve)—used by the priests in ancient Egypt, according to James M. Robinson 1990, 13. Robinson attributes the development of the written Coptic language to Christian scholars in Egypt responding to the desire of Egyptian Christians to have the Bible and other Christian writings available to ordinary people in a written form of their own spoken language which at that time did not have a written form suitable for translating the Bible and other Christian writings. The newly devised Coptic writing enabled Egyptian people to read the Bible and other Christian writings by learning the phonetics of the Greek alphabet, since hieroglyphic was the proprietary language of the priesthood and would not in any case be adequate in the translation of the Bible and other Christian writings. Of course, Coptic is also

distinct from the spoken and written language of modern Egyptian society which is Arabic, a language that became the predominant spoken and written language in Egyptian society beginning with the rapid expansion of Islam in the 7th century C. E. And, as Pagels makes clear, modern scholars were well aware of the Gnostic teachings and writings in the early Christian church through the writings of the orthodox spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, who critiqued and condemned them. Pagels asserts with some documentation that a major concern of the orthodox leaders in excluding the gnosis infused writings was the place given to women and the feminine dimension of life, and in particular the sexual aspect of life, in the theology and practices of the Gnostic communities, perspectives that were sometimes reflected in their accounts of the Christian story and teachings.

[¶4] **The methods, the purported theological standards, and the human/cultural/political motivations of the early church spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, in the process of scriptural canonization have been reexamined in recent studies.**

Dodd 1958, defending the popular gestalt of a more or less stabilized sanguinity concerning the canonization process of the early church, notes that the process of inclusion and exclusion was more intuitive and “rationalizing” than objective and analytical, yet that the assemblage of inclusions seems to be of compellingly higher quality in every respect than any possible assemblage that included some of what has been excluded. Johnson 1999, 596, describes the process of canonization as taking place in five stages with the final stage being official ratification by the church in the form of definitive tests, and he acknowledges that the process of development is far more organic and spontaneous in nature than the reasons or rationalizations given for the approval of official lists might suggest. But, 604, he also affirms that apostolic origin or association including the influence of Paul was a factor in the canonization process

along with the fight against gnostic teachers who claimed a secret succession for their esoteric books. And he notes that against that claim the orthodox spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, asserted that the New Testament writings did not emerge out of nowhere or only recently, but they could be traced along the public and universally recognized lines of ecclesiastical tradition. Childs 1992, 31-32, 56-69, attributes at least a patina or semblance of objectivity and analysis to Irenaeus in the process of inclusion and exclusion by way of a rule of faith, *regula fidei*, extracted from the Scriptures. That is, the rule of faith served as a guide not only for the interpretation of Scripture but also for confirming the authority and authenticity with respect to the gospel of Jesus Christ of the included writings and for rejecting those writings, teachings, and practices that were excluded. Pagels 1989, xxii and passim, discusses the language of “true faith,” “orthodoxy,” “heresy,” and “heretic” in the early church in a way that could not accede as Childs does to any technical or objective validity in a term such as *regula fidei*, rule of faith, just because it exists in the Latin of Irenaeus. And Pagels 2003, Chapter 4, discusses Irenaeus’ hypothesis of “the canon of truth” by which he dismisses interpretations and evaluations of Christian writings that differ from his own interpretations and evaluations. Has she translated *regula fidei* as canon of truth rather than canon (rule) of faith? I am not clear about that. But she, 1989 [1979], 109, does use the term rule of faith in mentioning that Tertullian, in his catholic or orthodox phase, defined the church as Irenaeus had, according to the rule of faith. Cullmann 1949 identifies in the New Testament writings brief summaries of the essential tenets of Christian belief which he tags “rules of faith” and “the earliest Christian Confessions.” Johnson 1999, 605-606, characterizes the *regula fidei*, which is referenced not only by Irenaeus but also by Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, as a transition point between the New Testament kerygma and the fully developed creeds of the councils. He notes that while the

elements of the *regula* are nowhere fully spelled out, there are key features such as the incarnation of the Word and the crucifixion of Jesus that can be deduced from the orthodox writings generally, and he acknowledges some circularity in this reasoning, and some anachronism in this use of the word orthodox. And he asserts, finally, that “Such a doctrinal norm (as the rule of faith, i.e., *regula fidei*) is not inconsistent with the outlook of the New Testament writings themselves, for we have observed throughout this book how each, in its own fashion, fought against deviance in teaching as much as in behavior.” Further, Johnson, 608 (in apparent response to the work of some canonical scholars whose names he mentions, 615-616, in the Bibliographical Note to the “Epilogue: The New Testament as the Church’s Book,” including most significantly the feminist writers, E. Schüssler Fiorenza and Elaine Pagels) acknowledges that politics and power struggles are always present in human corporate decision-making; there were dirty tricks and also higher motivations on both sides of the struggle, the orthodox (winners) and the heterodox (losers). And Johnson notes, 608, that while the canon became fixed at a point in history, its continued force depends on its reaffirmation by the church in every age, which the church does by reading these and only these writings in public worship and by using these texts alone in the debate over the nature of the kingdom. And Johnson concludes his response to the scholarly work that may seem to question the integrity of the canon of Scripture as it is by asserting that the important question is not the motivation and methods of the early church bishops in the process of inclusion and exclusion of Christian writings in the canon, but rather whether those factors of motivation (prejudice against women, for example) and methods (“dirty tricks,” for example) betrayed the sense of the church; that is, were the right choices made in spite of the factors of negative motivations and methods.

[¶5] **The significance of the “Nag Hammadi Library” which was discovered in Egypt in 1945 and the “Dead Sea Scrolls” which were serially uncovered in the Judean desert between 1947 and 1956, becomes clearer when seen in light of the dominant Greek culture of the Mediterranean world in the centuries immediately preceding and following the time of Christ, and in light of the actual contents of each set of documents, both of which consist principally of writings other than texts of the canonical scriptures of Old and New Testaments.**

James M. Robinson 1990, 3, suggests that modern students should assess the value and usefulness of the Nag Hammadi writings for modern spiritual seekers by trying to understand Gnosticism as the Gnostics present it rather than as our contemporary “heresy hunters” present it. Translation: read the actual Gnostic writings! Robinson also provides some historical perspective by noting that Christian Gnosticism, while it represents a dramatic shift from a Hebrew cosmology to a Greek cosmology, was just one reflection among many of the world-wide and centuries-long influence of the Greek cosmos conviction, i.e., “Hellenization,” that resulted in part from the expansion of Greek power and culture beginning with Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.E.). The military/political aspect of that history is summed up in the deuterocanonical (“Apocrypha”) First Book of The Maccabees, Chapter I (also mentioned in Book II, n. 20 [¶ 3]). That is, there already existed the Hellenization of Judaism and of other cultural/religious traditions, and even a Jewish emphasis on the concept of gnosis, for example, in the Essene sect of Judaism with communities in various towns of Israel and the desert community at Qumran (Khirbat Qumran) near the Dead Sea. Johnson’s 1999, 23-41, description of “The Greco-Roman World” indicates that it is more accurate to speak of the presence and influence of the notion of gnosis rather than Gnosticism in the larger and longer picture of the spread of Greek language and culture around the Mediterranean world, i.e., Hellenization, since, 30, “At the birth of the New Testament, gnosis lacked a structured form and appears to have become a fully identified

phenomenon only as the Christian heresy called Gnosticism.” Further, Johnson, 79-81, describes how the world environment of Greek wisdom, culture, and philosophy largely dictated the language and categories of the apologetic writings of Alexandrian Judaism, for example, 80, “In the Wisdom of Solomon (1st cent. B.C.E.), the ancient wisdom tradition of the Jews is recast in a distinctively Hellenistic mold,” the particulars of which Johnson goes on to describe as the themes of vice and virtue, Wisdom (Sophia) personified as a pure emanation of the glory of God, the work of personified Wisdom in the history of Israel, a particular sympathy for the ignorant plight of the pagan nations, etc. Johnson, 501-502, also demonstrates how classic debates among the sects of Hellenistic philosophy have influenced the sects of Palestinian Judaism by the time of the New Testament writings: “Among Jewish sects, the Epicurean position (denial of God’s rule or providence) was associated with the Sadducees, while the Pharisees represented the defense of God’s providence (the Stoic position).” And Johnson sees these Hellenic and Jewish divisions reflected in the argument of 2 Peter concerning the apparent delay of the promised reappearing of the Christ and concerning what sort of life Christians should live in the meantime. Vermes 2004, 88, cites Josephus in discussing the common thread of Hellenic Gnosticism (i.e., gnosis) that runs through both the Essene Jewish community of Dead Sea Scrolls fame and the Coptic Christian community of Nag Hammadi Library fame. Another commonality between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library is that, as mentioned in the heading above, they both consist principally of writings other than texts of the canonical scriptures of Old and New Testaments. For example, the Table of Contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Vermes 2004, vii-xii, brings to mind the constituting documents of a Protestant Christian denomination with its rules of order, book of discipline, way of worship, and creeds, covenants, or scripture commentaries reflecting the community’s sectarian theological stance and belief system. And the contents of

the Nag Hammadi library seen in the “Table of Tractates in the Coptic Gnostic Library” in James M. Robinson 1990, XIII-XIV, indicates a complete absence of canonical texts of the New Testament, being rather imaginative mystical meditations *attributed* to New Testament Apostles as well as some unattributed interpretations and instructions for the community’s rites of Baptism, and Eucharist.

[¶6] **Here are some representative scholarly perspectives on the interface between the Greek cosmos conviction and modern/postmodern western culture, and between some of the classical Greek philosophical schools of thought and some of the modern/postmodern movements in philosophy and worldview.**

Zuurdeeg 1958, 201-242, discusses the continuing and pervasive influence of, and resistance to, the Greek cosmos conviction in Western culture, including science, religion, philosophy, and politics. With regard to modern philosophy, for example, the World of Plato as described by Allen and Springsted 2007, 12-14, contains the seeds or precursors of dialecticism, phenomenology, and structuralism as well as Gnosticism, as I read it. And the same authors, 89, indicate that while one adaptation of Plato’s world view, i.e., the Greek cosmos conviction, led to the development of Gnosticism, Aristotle’s adaptation of Plato led to a different understanding of the soul from that of Gnosticism, an understanding that greatly influenced medieval scholastic Christian theologians including Thomas Aquinas. And they note in the Introduction, xv-xxv, that modern Western culture and thought are deeply infused with Hellenic culture; and they assert that Greek philosophy is one of the two main sources of Christian theology, the other being the Bible. And they observe, 4, how the later Gnostics and the Manichaeans while shaped by the Platonic cosmology diverged from Plato by failing to acknowledge an essential or residual goodness and beauty in the material world and life of existence (I also reference this in Book II,

n. 20 [¶ 3]). Diogenes Allen 1989, 24, observed that it was Christianity's positive attitudes toward the material world, partly native to the biblical or Hebraic perspective and partly inherited from ancient Greece, notwithstanding the divergence of Gnosticism and Manichaeism from Platonism into a fundamentally negative view of the material world, that made Christianity conducive to the rise of modern science. Those positive attitudes toward the material world were not possessed by other more ancient civilizations such as India, Egypt, China, even though they were in some cases sufficiently advanced technologically, intellectually, and culturally. On the other hand, Diogenes Allen's 1989, 24-25, discussion of Christian thinking about the likelihood or necessity, i.e., not requiring a leap of faith, of an intelligence, such as the living God, behind the systems of order observed in nature and the cosmos, suggests that Christianity might at times have tended toward the same hazard mentioned of Greek rationalism: imposing upon empirical observations of reality a system arrived at by abstract reasoning. And, notably, Allen, 27-34, also discusses Christianity's mixed record—contributions, receptivity, resistance—regarding the rise of classical modern science due to the church's adoption of Aristotle's view of the heavens, leading to the trial of Galileo by Pope Urban VIII, and the distortion of that trial out of all proportion by the 18th century French philosopher-scientists in order to propagate the popular and elite notion of an inherent conflict between Christianity and science or reason. And, as Allen indicates, 29, awareness of what can be known about the trial of Galileo and the deviousness and ignorance on both sides of the origins of that long-running bogus conflict can lead one to the conclusion "that there was no fundamental clash between Christianity and the theory that the universe revolves around the sun." And he notes, 34, that understanding the complexity of Galileo's trial can help all sides to avoid the self-righteousness that is often displayed when people talk about that trial. Johnson 1996, 88, notes that as important as the biblical archaeology

discoveries of the 20th century are, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library, the authority and reliability of the canonical scriptures are not essentially changed. Butcher 2002, 245, notes that “the canon has never been determined for Protestants except by common consent.” James Sanders 1972 indicates that all canons of religious writings or any other genre emerge by common consent, after which they may or may not be made official by the governing councils of various communities. Various Protestant denominations, in their constituting documents, have specified by name each of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament as together being the inspired and authoritative Word of God. That, it seems to me, constitutes a Protestant canon – by common consent and by official action.

[17] **Dominant voices and minority voices share various perspectives on the nature of the scriptural witness in relation to the use of scripture in faith communities and in relation to modern/postmodern understandings of the study of history. Also, some scripture scholars take an either/or approach and some take a both/and approach to the portrayal of Jesus in the biblical witness to Jesus as remembered in the early church faith communities and the modern/postmodern portrayal of Jesus on the basis of historical and scientific scholarship.**

Buttrick 1987, 239-244, discusses problems with traditional concepts of the authority of Scripture and prefers to speak of the Bible as a gift from God to be opened, used, and enjoyed with appreciation and respect. Mitchell 1990, 56-57, writing on “the Black approach to the Bible,” describes a multifaceted and creative hermeneutic which has emerged out of an oral tradition in preliterate slavery times akin to both that behind the Old Testament writings and that of traditional African cultures, and in which the written word is taken as illustrative of the precepts handed down orally by the ancestors. Procter-Smith 1993, 53-54, has a brief description

of some of the objections of feminist and other liberationist movements to traditional and male dominant approaches to the authority of the Bible, in which she mentions some suggestions for supplementing the canon and for alternative lectionaries. Deiss 1976, 314, citing D. Bosch, has an interesting approach regarding the questionability of the authenticity of certain words attributed to Jesus: “They should be regarded as a *saying in* the Lord rather than a *saying of* the Lord.” Dodd 1958, 193, expresses a similar sentiment. Johnson 1996 has a summarily negative and somewhat dismissive assessment of the third quest for the historical Jesus by some of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar and other scripture scholars and a thoroughly sanguine assessment of the traditional Gospels, that is, the canonical Gospels as we have them in their final form. (I identify the three Quests in the next paragraph.) Marcus Borg, a Jesus scholar and a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, describes in 2001, 190, two ways of reading the Gospels:

The first way of reading focuses on ‘the historical Jesus’: the Jesus of the early layers of the developing tradition behind or beneath the surface level of the Gospels. The second way focuses on ‘the canonical Jesus’: the Jesus we encounter on the surface level of the Gospels in their present form. We do not need to choose between these two ways of reading the Gospels. Both are legitimate and useful.

Borg observes in a note that many scripture scholars in the 20th century chose up sides to focus their studies on either the historical Jesus or on the canonical Jesus and mentions Luke Timothy Johnson 1996 as an example of the canonical Jesus focus, and he cites his own 1994 work for a summary of the two positions in the history of scholarship. Johnson 1999, owns his focus on the canonical text rather than the historical trail of layers or sources behind that text throughout the book and, 595, finally reasserts it in the first paragraph of his 24-page “Epilogue: The New Testament as the Church’s Book:” “Our subject is the New Testament canon and its implications for the community that accepts the New Testament writings as authoritative for faith and practice.” I have discussed the canonical approach in Chapter II, where I note that the “canonical

process” described by James Sanders 1984, 21-45, has a very distinct take on the so-called inauthentic or spurious texts since every text that remains in the canon apparently had an important value to a believing community at some point along the way.

[¶8] **Here is a brief overview of the three quests for the historical Jesus and their (1) perspectives on the apocalyptic theological climate in the time of Jesus, (2) the division of labor between God and humans in the work and fulfillment/merger of God’s heavenly and earthly kingdoms, and (3) the subjunctive or aspirational quality of the announcement by Jesus and his apostles in every age of God’s claims, purposes, and passions as king of the universe.**

I referred above to the work of the scholars of the Jesus Seminar as the third quest of the historical Jesus. The first quest of the historical Jesus was the plethora of scholarly works on the life and mission of Jesus published mainly in the nineteenth century and given critical and summary review in Schweitzer 1961 [1906 in German]; the second quest being the approach taken by Norman Perrin and other New Testament scholars during the 1950’s and 1960’s, according to Donelson 1997 and his respondents in the same publication. Perrin 1963 follows Schweitzer’s pattern by trying to review all of the most serious scholarly efforts during a certain span in the first half of the twentieth century but confines his review to the views of various scholars on Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God as to the apocalyptic elements, the present-future tension, and the apportioning of kingdom labor (work of God and work of humans) including implications for ethics (how subjects of the king are to live). The third quest for the historical Jesus is exemplified in the work of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar that flourished in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Third Quester and Jesus scholar Borg 2003, 126-148, in a chapter “The Kingdom of God: The Heart of Justice” reviews some of the same biblical and other theological perspectives on the kingdom of God theme that are discussed by

Perrin 1963 and then focuses his discussion on the theme of God's passion for temporal or secular justice in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, and the notion that biblical descriptions of the kingdom of God, including in the similes and parables of Jesus, are aspirational descriptions of the way things could be and would be in this present world and age if God were directly and effectually in charge as King rather than the present rulers that are supposed to function as God's viceroys but do not always share God's passion for justice that *includes* compassion (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 61]). This brings to mind Lischer's 1988, 73-74, discussion of expressive language rather than data-driven language and his 2001, 23, discussion of story and storytelling as appropriate for preaching understood as promise, that is, as a way of opening up both teller and hearer to a new future, that is, to the way things could be or might be, which I cite more fully in Chapter IV [¶ 61]. N. T. Wright 1996, 13-27, provides a critical review and assessment of "The 'Quests' and their Usefulness," and, 98, he embraces Schweitzer's view of the apocalyptic climate of Israel in the time of Jesus and Jesus' apocalyptic and messianic view of his own mission. Schmidt 1997, 30, a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, characterizes N. T. Wright as himself a quester after Jesus' historical life who is a conservative theologian with some postmodern sensitivities, that is, as demurring from the most extreme skeptical approaches followed in modernist literary-historical criticism and as having a tendency to treat the Gospels simply as biographical sources of the facts of Jesus' life including how Jesus saw himself in relation to the hopes of Israel. Bultmann 1957, 110-122, has a useful discussion of the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity in the study and writing of history and, 120 and passim, he grapples with the problems that an apocalyptic vision of the end and goal and meaning of history presents to people of a modern or scientific perspective on the nature of the cosmos and its history. That brings to mind the assertion of astronomer Carl Sagan, the lapsed

Roman Catholic agnostic, in his television series *Cosmos*, that the universe as we know it will eventually go up in flames and that the best we can do to postpone that apocalypse is to do all we can to take care of our environment.

[¶9] **There are potential values and assured hazards in any and all efforts to distill a clear picture of what kind of person Jesus was or precisely what words he said or what actions he took, out of the diffuse written record in the New Testament of communally developed memories of Gospel writers who have a 50-year faithful relationship with Jesus as the Christ with a continuing and living presence in their lives.**

Donelson 1997 discusses the comparative contributions and failings of the third quest for the historical Jesus, including the work of the Jesus Seminar, and the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida. The Jesus books published by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, fellows of the Jesus Seminar, have used the deconstruction concepts of Derrida along with the methods of modern historical criticism in their attempt to distinguish the pre-Easter Jesus of the New Testament text from the post-Easter Jesus of the New Testament text. Borg 2003, 82, 99, n.2, explains that the terminology “pre-Easter Jesus and post-Easter Jesus” is preferred to the more familiar “Jesus of history (or historical Jesus) and the Christ of faith” because the witness to both Jesuses can be seen in the New Testament, a historical document, by any person who looks whether a person of faith or not (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 12]). Donelson has used the same cocktail of approaches to critique those Jesus books; and Donelson’s respondents in the same publication, Francis Watson, Mary Knutsen, and Daryl Schmidt, have used some of the same combination of concepts and approaches and more to assess the contributions and failings of Donelson’s essay. Donelson, in a follow-up interview with an editor, reported in the same place, recommended that pastors not try to read Derrida unless they have lots of time. And since I, like most of the retired people I know, am “busier than ever,” what with volunteer work,

extended exercise, cultural, and entertainment programs, and a dream house and yard to care for as an avid do-it-yourself-er, I have heeded Donelson's advice by not trying to read Derrida. But I have been assisted in getting a glimmer of what Derrida is about by Allen and Springsted 2007 and Donelson 2012, as noted below, and by Palmer 1997, Powell 1997, and Scholes 1974.

According to modern historical criticism, quite apart from Derrida's deconstructionism, the process of separation of Jesus' likely authentic words from words attributed to Jesus by the church's Gospel writers and the pre-Easter Jesus from the post-Easter Jesus is interminable and mostly indeterminate all along the way since the New Testament writers had been living in the communal faith experience of the risen and ever present Jesus as the Christ for over fifty years when they undertook to put the church's communal faith memory of Jesus both before and after the cross and resurrection from both oral and documentary sources into the written forms that eventually came to be assembled and canonized as the New Testament. Consider Knutsen 1997, 25, to the effect that, citing Eugene Boring, the Gospels, especially Mark, were written to help people encounter the risen Lord through the story of his earthly life, cast as a kind of resurrection appearance. On the other hand, Borg 2003, 89-91, explains how he thinks that modern historical Jesus studies can be useful and edifying to Christians today without preferring the pre-Easter Jesus over the post-Easter Jesus or vice-versa. The historical Jesus studies can help to flesh out the meaning of the incarnation of the eternal Word (logos) of God in the life of one Palestinian Jew by outlining a picture of what Jesus of Nazareth was really like, a picture that is not drawn through the lens of a communal faith knowledge of the risen, exalted/glorified, and ever-present Jesus as the Christ. Borg, in his outline of what the pre-Easter or historical Jesus was really like, explains what is meant by the following characterizations: *Jewish mystic, healer, wisdom teacher, social prophet, and movement initiator*. Perhaps more useful for understanding the

nature of historiography in general and the confessional (faith based) history writing in the Bible in particular, are the discussions of the function of inference by Collingwood 1994 and G. Ernest Wright 1952, which I have referenced more fully in Chapter II and have mentioned also in Chapter IV.

[¶10] **Here, I reference some instructive scholarly perspectives on the interface between the functions of scripture in faith communities and the function of scripture in academic work, and, thus, the relationship of canonical scripture as it is to the history of transmission from source events, communities, persons, and writings to the ultimate stabilization or closing of the canon.**

Allen and Springsted 2007, 227-230, explain the technique of reading that Derrida dubbed “deconstruction:” taking what are assumed to be hard-and-fast distinctions such as presence/absence, being/nonbeing, true/false, analytic/synthetic and showing their porosity to each other; and they have a review of efforts to defend Derrida from accusations of relativism regarding reality by noting that what he exposes as relative, subjective, situational, or convention bound, is how we use language to represent reality and truth, not that the fact and existence of reality and truth themselves are relative. Thus, for example, your claim that your great, great, great grandparents once existed and lived and wrote letters on this earth and created family memories that have been passed on through the generations may be said to be relative as to how you and your family have used language to express this claim, but that does not suggest that your great, great, great grandparents may or may not have existed and written letters and instigated orally transmitted memories. Donelson 2012, 8, has a useful definition of the situation or case where deconstruction in literature, in the sense intended by Derrida as distinct from the popular sense of critical demolition, is needed, in an article on ethics (also referenced in Chapter II [¶16]). Donelson asserts that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is deconstructing certain ethical

injunctions of the Torah because the Torah as taught and used and understood in Jesus' time fit the definition of a system in need of deconstruction (or that has effectually deconstructed itself). Thus, a system is in need of deconstruction: "whenever the core principle of a system or sequence of thought undermines and destabilizes the system or sentences it creates." The serious deconstructive work (not the publicity stunts) of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar and other Jesus scholars makes clear that such explanations of the nature of the New Testament witness to Jesus as the Christ as those by Buttrick, Deiss, Dodd, Johnson, and others, helpful as they are, do not end the questioning. Dodd 1958 [1929] provides an inductive study of canon and authority in Scripture in the light of the historical impact of the fact of Christ. His approach is announced, described and defended in Preface to First Edition, ix-x, in the 1958 edition, and in Chapter I, 1-21. James Sanders 1984, xv, in the "Prologue: Spirit and Community," writes of the movement of canonical criticism in biblical studies a statement that is suggestive of Dodd's 1958 [1929] inductive approach:

Its (canonical criticism's) focus is on the function of the Bible as canon in the believing communities which formed and shaped it and passed it on to their heirs of today. Canon *and* Community. They go together. Neither truly exists without the other. Enlightenment scholarship subsequent to the Reformation has so focused on original, historical meanings that it has very nearly decanonized the Bible. Its proper *Sitz im Leben*, or life setting, is the believing communities, Jewish and Christian, which find their identities in it and try to live their lives in the light of it. Its proper life setting is not the scholar's study but the liturgical and instructional programs of believing communities; that is where it reaches full stature.

Lowry 1997, 49-52, has a discussion of several perspectives on how to assess the truth claims of narrative texts including their historical use and social impact. Ricoeur 1995, 68-70, distinguishes between sacred and authoritative and he chronicles how the Christian scriptures became authoritative through the process of accumulation, inclusion (and exclusion) and canonization, and thus subject to the tradition of church councils, and how the relationship was

reversed by some branches of Protestantism that radicalized Luther's *sola scriptura* and made ecclesiastical tradition subject to the divine authority of *sacred* scripture. Barth 1938, 176-182, delineates his own take on *sola scriptura* in regard to the service of God in the government of the church according to the Scots Confession. Ricoeur 1995, 70-71, suggests that the canonical text became a kind of Protestant theological magisterium, interpreting itself and the theologians, which, of course fuels a distorting kind of negative biblicism, which I discuss below. Johnson 1999, 595, expresses hope that the distortions produced by over reliance on tradition (historical church teaching and practice as distinct from scripture as tradition) in the Roman Catholic theological magisterium and narrow focus on Scripture in the de facto Protestant theological magisterium can be remedied by modern scholars studying Scripture and tradition in tandem and keeping them together in balance and dynamic tension.

[¶11] **Here are some divergent perspectives on the sense in which a religious text may come to be sacred or authoritative in a faith community and by what means the human writing of a text may be an inspired writing and, thus, the text may be thought of as inspired scripture even though it is not the text but the writer who has experienced the movement of the Spirit of God when putting the revelation tradition of his or her faith community into written form.**

My own perception has been that the word sacred has the connotation of an oracle or a body of writings that claims to be handed down in a supernatural event such as Borg 2001, 99, names a theophany (manifestation of God) or a hierophany (manifestation of the sacred, *hieros* being the Greek word for hallowed or holy which is included in the Greek words for sacred rites and priesthood). Thus, the Ten Commandments that God wrote twice on stone tablets for Moses (Deut. 5:22, 10:4) represent a sacred text that arose in a theophany or hierophany. (According to Ex. 34:28, God dictated and Moses wrote on the replacement tablets). Other examples of texts

being considered sacred because they originated in a supernatural theophany or hierophany are the Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to the apostles as the documentary basis of the resurrection faith, which Johnson 1999, 107-122, discusses; or the Book of Mormon revealed in the golden plates discovered by Joseph Smith with help from the angel Moroni; or the Koran (Qur'an) divinely channeled in elegant Arabic to the semi-literate Prophet Mohammed. (According to Renaud 2022, in a *Tulsa World* reprint of a reprint of an article on Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, "Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammed was visited by the angel Gibreel (Gabriel) who, over a 22-year period, recited God's words to him. In turn, Muhammed repeated the words to his followers. These words were eventually written down and became the verses and chapters of the Qur'an.) But it is not clear that Luther's Reformation teaching of *sola scriptura* or Ricoeur's distinction between authoritative and sacred requires such a supernatural genesis for understanding of scripture as sacred. Contrary to the notion of sacred scripture referring to writing of a supernatural or miracle origin, Borg 2003, 7, 14, indicates that in a newer or emerging paradigm the Bible is seen as a human product, yet is seen as sacred scripture not because it is a divine product or of supernatural origin, as in an earlier paradigm, but it is sacred because of its status and function in faith communities. I see a parallel here with Dodd's 1958 [1929] inductive study wherein the authority of the Bible is demonstrated by the function and use of the Bible in communities of faith throughout the history of the Bible's existence. That should not be greatly surprising since the emerging paradigm of which Borg writes is shaped by the advent of the modern historical critical approach to the Bible which emerged in the 19th century, stemming in part at least from the Enlightenment developments in western civilization during the 17th and 18th centuries, and quickly proliferated among professional biblical scholars but is still emerging among Christian people generally with the

result that much of our discourse in Bible study classes and groups continues to use a mixed bag of language, talking at times as if the words of the Bible were “inspired” by God dictating the words to the human biblical writers, and talking at other times as if the choice of words and scenarios in the Bible could only be understood in terms of the historical political and cultural circumstances and motivations of the human writers. Seeing the status of the Bible as a sacred or authoritative writing as based on its use and function in faith communities rather than on its divine or supernatural origin does not eliminate the notion that the Bible is a divinely *inspired* writing. But, as Borg 2003, 46, clarifies, in the emerging paradigm inspiration does not embrace the notion of verbal or plenary inspiration in which God in effect dictates every word to the biblical writers but rather: “inspiration refers to the movement of the Spirit in the lives of the people who produced the Bible. The emphasis is not upon *words* inspired by God, but on *people* moved by their experience of the Spirit, namely, these ancient communities and the individuals who wrote for them.” Johnson 1999, 109, provides a useful perspective on the mundane aspect of Religious texts that purport to describe a revelatory experience of the holy or the sacred in the following paragraph.

Human experiences are also mediated by the available symbols of a person’s world. In the very act of perception—in the experience itself—there is already a form of interpretation. There is no naked experience of the holy. The totally other is mediated by that which is not totally other: human symbols. The more powerful the encounter, of course, the more those symbols will stretch and possibly even shatter.

[¶12] **Initial encounter with the parallels, commonalities, and borrowings among the biblical faith tradition and other cultures and faith traditions can be confusing and disillusioning in a negative sense, but can be followed by a positive valuing of the disillusionment and a new appreciation of God as the creator and Lord of all that is, the God who is not limited to one’s own tradition, as well as an appreciation of the wisdom of one’s own spiritual progenitors in their unabashed**

borrowing from other ancient traditions.

Craddock 2011, 69, discusses the initially devastating yet eventually healthy disillusionment that can accompany a pious Christian's discovery of the Bible's borrowings from other cultures and other religions. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 103, wrote "...it should be emphasized more strongly than heretofore that the theological base of international wisdom was radically shifted when it was brought into Israel... The motto of the wisdom movement in Israel was 'the fear of Yahweh', which is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 1.7; 9.10). Thus, Yahweh is the true source of wisdom (cf. Job. 28) and the author of prudential morality. It is he who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked." James Sanders 1984, 47-60, in his chapter on "Canonical Hermeneutics," points to the Bible's monotheizing trajectory in both its internal adjustments and in its incorporation of matter that is part of its own cultural environment, some of which, such as wisdom writings and creation stories, is common in kind and substance with matter that existed earlier in other ancient religions. Such commonalities among ancient religions that share overlapping cultures are related to the archetypal symbols and stories that are studied in relation to both psychological phenomena, e.g., archetypes in Greek mythology used in Jungian dream interpretation; but also in relation to social structures and historical narratives, as referenced in Borg 2001, 42-51, in his discussion of reading the Bible through both the lens of history and the lens of metaphor. Borg mentions images in the book of Revelation and Matthew's star guiding the wise men to Jesus' birth place as examples of the Bible's use of archetypal symbols and stories. And Sanders 1984, 48, highlights two hermeneutic axioms operating in the Bible, and recognized among biblical scholars, especially in the last half of the 20th century: God as Creator of all peoples, and God as Redeemer in Israel and Christ; and, writes Sanders, "We thank God for the Babylonians and Canaanites, and that ancient Israel had

sense enough to learn from others of God's children." Sanders, 48-51, demonstrates how Israel's monotheizing hermeneutic of one God who is Creator of all people and Redeemer in one treasured people, Israel, worked in adapting the great Gilgamesh flood epic by subtly shifting the attention from the characters in the story, heroic as Noah may be, to what God is doing in the story and what God intends and does with these human characters. Sanders, 50, also demonstrates Israel's hermeneutic of theological exegesis (what is God intending or doing in the text or behind the text?—a useful step in sermon development according to Wilson 2007) in Israel's adaptation of the story of Balaam's ass. I note in Chapter II and in Chapter IV that Wilson 2007, 39-53, 229-262, recommends that preachers in sermon preparation follow their literary analysis and historical exegesis with theological exegesis—what God is intending and doing in the text or behind the text—and follow their theological exegesis with a gospel hermeneutic—discerning the good news of God's grace, love, and promise for all people in the text—in formulating what the text and the sermon are to do with and mean to the preacher and the congregation. And, 49, Wilson asserts that the Reformers and Barth's commentary on Romans attest that grammatical analysis and historical criticism are not enough: the help of the Holy Spirit and theological analysis are needed. And he, 51, explains how this approach of theological exegesis and a gospel hermeneutic can enable a preacher to formulate a theme sentence for a gospel sermon that is a message of hope and encouragement, declaring what God is doing and intending in and behind the text and in the present world and situation of the congregation.

[¶13] **Some interpretive principles distilled out of the Bible itself indicate certain theological principles (views of God in relation to the experienced reality of the world) that guided the development of the biblical tradition as its earliest human exponents recorded the**

distinctive perspectives in terms that had much in common with other ancient traditions.

Wilson's 2007 concept of "theological exegesis" could find support and guidance in Sanders' 1984, 52, observation that "The Bible as canon betrays a broad theocentric hermeneutic." And, according to Sanders, 51, the Bible's interpretation of reality is not only God-centered, it is *one*-God-centered:

The Bible comes to us from five culture eras of struggles to monotheize over against different kinds of polytheism: The Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman eras. Each of those cultures had its own kinds of polytheism, and the Bible reflects the various struggles to monotheize, that is, to pursue the Integrity of Reality. Each era left a residue of idioms derived from the polytheisms of its culture, precisely because of the struggle to monotheize. This can be seen especially well in those instances when Israel learned something from her neighbors, for then we can do a comparative study of the biblical and the nonbiblical material and discern precisely the hermeneutics of adaptation.

And Sanders, 50-60, states that "Taking the Bible seriously on its own terms, by ferreting out the unrecorded hermeneutics which lie throughout its pages, has yielded five salient observations" about the Bible's internal hermeneutic for adapting materials from its own community as well as international material to the Bible's message of one God who is Creator of all peoples and Redeemer in Israel and Christ:

- *The Bible is a monotheizing literature.*
- *The Bible as canon betrays a broad theocentric hermeneutic.*
- *Much of the Bible celebrates the theologem: *errore hominum providentia divina* (God's grace works in and through human sinfulness).*
- *God betrays a divine bias for the weak and dispossessed.*
- *The hermeneutic process by which the wisdom of others was adapted and resignified.*

And he explains and demonstrates with examples how each one of these observations works in

the Bible.

[¶14] **Thinking of the Bible as sacred scripture might tend toward the notion of a supernatural oracle dropped or dictated from heaven, as mentioned above [¶ 11] and again in Chapter II [¶ 6]. But the word sacred can also refer to the Bible as a historical document that functions as a mediator, a sacrament as it were, that helps people experience a sacred dimension or a spiritual presence that is beyond empirical or historical demonstration.**

The word authoritative suggests a collection of writings that have been designated by an ecclesiastical council as the ones believed to be a faithful written witness of God's revelation of himself through historical people and events. Thus Ricoeur 1995, 72, indicates that he was very reluctant to use the word "sacred" in his essay on revelation because "Revelation is a historical process but the notion of sacred text is something antihistorical." But, with a slightly different nuance on the word sacred, Borg 2001, 28-33, bases the sacred status of the Bible as a human product on its function as a channel or a sacrament that facilitates the spiritual experience or sense of a sacred dimension in life and reality and he describes how such an understanding of the sacred status and spiritual function of the scriptures affects one's understanding of the authority of the Bible: "Rather than being an authority ('monarch') standing above us, the Bible is the ground of the (symbolic) world in which Christians live." Both the distinction made by Ricoeur and that made by Borg may be without a difference to a person who believes that the Holy Spirit was present and working in the people and events memorialized in the writings and also at work in the writers and in the transcribers and redactors and in the ecclesiastical councils and is also present and working in our faithful teachers and preachers, and in us and in our faith communities as we read and hear the message read and proclaimed in worship services. James Sanders 1984, xvii, suggests something of that sort as the model for understanding the inspiration

of scripture from the perspective of canonical criticism:

The model (that) canonical criticism sponsors as more nearly true to what happened, and what happens, is that of the Holy Spirit at work all along the path of the canonical process: from original speaker, through what was understood by hearers; to what disciples believed was said; to how later editors reshaped the record, oral or written, of what was said; on down to modern hearings and understandings of the texts in current believing communities.

That affirmation may be qualified by considering Borg's 2001, 125, discussion of the distinction between theophanic experience and prophetic inspiration in relation to cultural/political utterance. And Pagels 1989 [1979], 142, and 2003, 76, discusses the danger of a shallow polemicism in using an article of faith such as belief in the historically pervasive work of the Holy Spirit as an historical argument. Such a use of faith commitments in historical discussions is sometimes referred to as fideism, i.e., faithism. But, from a different angle, Allen and Springsted 2007, 222, note that Wittgenstein's notion of "forms of life" "is important in itself and also for responding to accusations of fideism." Sanders' statement above was not presented as a historical argument but rather as a view of what is meant by an affirmation that the canonical scriptures, i.e., the received text or final redaction, are inspired by God as an alternative to the now conventional but relatively late notion that God inspired the original speakers or writers of the words and that any changes that have taken place in the process of historical transmission were not inspired by God. Thus, the view of inspiration suggested by Sanders is not far from that which Borg 2003, 46, describes:

Within the emerging paradigm, inspiration refers to the movement of the Spirit in the lives of the people who produced the Bible. The emphasis is not upon words inspired by God, but on *people* moved by their experience of the Spirit, namely, these ancient communities and individuals who wrote for them.

Bonhoeffer 1975, 141-142, discusses questions about using the doctrine of inspiration, whether traditional (pre-scientific) or reconstructed (modernized), to take the Bible out of its historical

situation. Johnson 1999, 610-611, references several different understandings of what is meant by divine inspiration in reference to prophecy, testimony, and authority in Scripture and how the Spirit of God works in and with human authors and their time-conditioned words and symbols (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 2]). Perhaps Ricoeur's representation of an option between sacred and authoritative is a gesture of courtesy to skeptics who like to study the Bible only as an historical literary artifact.

[¶15] **Additional images and ways of understanding and embracing the dual character of the Bible as both a flawed human document and God's chosen vessel to carry God's good news abroad include the following: incarnate words by and about the INCARNATE WORD, catalytic converter, myth as carrier of truth-filled meaning.**

It is important for believing Jews and Christians to respect God's incarnational choice, that is, God's decision to use humanly produced and thus fallible memoirs, in the inspiration of the written witness of his self-revelation in history. Willimon 1981, 17, observes that it is most unbiblical to deny or overlook the incarnational, i.e., historically contextualized, nature of Scripture (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 2]). God did not choose to hand down the Old and New Testaments in a supernatural or oracular event, even though there are oracles and theophanies recorded in both Testaments. Rather, God chose to have it written down by people of faith over many centuries using the ordinary faculties of human observation, memory, imagination, and language that reflect their pre-scientific perceptions of the world. Thus the humanity, historical contingency, and even fallibility of scripture may be seen, to use a phrase from Bonhoeffer, as part and parcel of the "humiliation" of Christ, an essential part of his taking flesh and dwelling among us - in the dual divine-human nature of Scripture (Fant 1975, 40, also cited in Chapter II [¶ 2]). Alter 1981, 12, notes that a literary approach in understanding the religious or theological

intent for faith in the stories of the Hebrew Bible is justified and even required because God's experiment with Israel and history is dependent on the acts of individual people for the continuing realization of that experiment. Long 2005, 57-58, sums up this dual character of the Bible in two concise sentences: "Because the Bible is in human language, and the texts of the Bible were written both for and in social situations, everything about the Bible is culturally conditioned. Because the ultimate referent of biblical texts is God, everything about the Bible is infused with gospel" (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 8] and Chapter IV [¶ 53]). And, 57, he discusses how to read and interpret the scriptural texts so as to hear the gospel as a kind of force at work in a biblical text cutting across two kinds of cultural static, that of the text's cultural world and that of our own cultural world, and he cites J. Christian Beker on a "catalytic reading of Scripture," a more sanguine idea, it seems to me, than that of demythologization; think "treasure in clay jars," 2 Cor. 4:7. I reference Long on Beker again in Chapter II [¶ 8] where [¶ 26] I also cite Allen and Springsted's 2007, 194-195, philosophical perspective on Bultmann's project of demythologizing of the New Testament, and I mention several ways of framing the task of New Testament interpretation that I find more agreeable, useful, and accessible than demythologization, including analytical philosophy, phenomenology, other postmodernist philosophies, historical and metaphorical perspectives, symbolic worlds, and an understanding of the symbolic power and meaning of myth in a broader sense than merely the reports of ancient cosmologies, spiritual world views, and extraordinary human powers, visions, and events handed down from pre-scientific times. Soskice 2010, 198, has an interesting citation on this theological or faith-based view of Scripture with its human history of transmission and redaction taken in stride as God's incarnational choice by two "amateur" philologists, Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Smith Dunlop Gibson, the twin "Sisters of Sinai."

[¶16] **The words *biblicist* and *biblicism* must be interpreted in relation to the historical, cultural, and literary context in which they are used since both terms have had and have been used in a pejorative and in a neutral or affirmative sense.**

Any treatment of the Bible that does not respect the mundane character of the writings and of the manner in which they came into existence and have been transmitted to us through history is surely a form of *biblicism*, in the negative sense of that term. I have a related discussion of *biblicism* in Chapter III. N. T. Wright 1992, 139-140, proposes an understanding of biblical authority, meaning normative for the faith of Christians, that rejects pre-modern, *biblicist* proof-texting and makes appropriate and responsible use of modern critical, descriptive tools, yet without separating the two, that is, the “ought” of authority and the “is” of literary, historical, scientific observation and analysis. And he asserts that the key to this symbiosis is *story*. Most contemporary theologians, historians, and scripture scholars use *biblicism* in the negative or pejorative sense indicated here. But Bebbington 1989 reports that some self-designated “evangelicals” in the United Kingdom, embrace the term *biblicism* affirmatively and define it thus “Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority.” The term *biblicism* does not appear in Article 1 on the Bible of the Statement of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals (U.S.A.): “We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.” The preceding two citations were seen at <http://www.nae.net> (accessed in 2013). In addition to being aware that there are those who positively embrace the terms *biblicism* and *biblicist* and being aware of what they mean by the terms, it is also good to be cognizant of an older and variant usage of the term *biblicist*. The first definition of *biblicist* in some dictionaries, e.g., *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1949 edition, is “one versed in the Bible,” a usage not mentioned in more recent editions, but which

may still be found in 21st century writings, e.g., Park 2013, 3, referring to “a famous biblicist,” meaning a well-known academic specialist in scripture studies, not one who is afflicted with a negative biblicism or one who embraces a positive biblicism. Another example of that older usage is seen in Deiss 1992, 42, where he avers that the Vatican II call for a more biblical church does not intend a church of biblicists whose principal concern would be exegesis but a church life more rooted in the Bible rather than so much in ecclesiastical tradition. Generally, if an approach to the Bible is called biblicist, the term is meant in a negative way and if someone is referred to as a biblicist one must judge by the context what is meant by the term.

[¶17] **People who use the word evangelical have a responsibility to make clear which historical meaning or connotation of that word they have in mind, especially when they self-referentially use evangelical as a modifier for the word Christian and when they use evangelical to label a particular church, parish or congregation.**

Just as the terms biblicist and biblicism are fraught with ambiguity in usage, so is the term evangelical. When Martin Luther used the term evangelical in Reformation times, he meant something like Deiss’s assessment, cited above, of the Vatican II call for a more biblical church, a church life more rooted in the Bible and its gospel message (evangel). My nephew, Jeffrey K. Ploger, who has kindly read my manuscript at stages along the way, recently (2021) brought to my attention Pelikan’s 1991 discussion of the evangelical movement of the 18th and 19th centuries associated with the first and second Great Awakenings, a movement which emphasized the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the experience of a change of heart, and a life of imitating the life and work of Christ, suggesting that one must have a singular conversion experience in order to be an evangelical Christian. Unfortunately, there is today a clear implication by some who label themselves evangelical Christians that some of us who take

a different approach to scripture interpretation, theology, church life and mission, personal ethics, social ethics, and one's personal faith experience from their own approach are neither biblical Christians nor evangelical Christians. I wish that people who seem to never tire of designating themselves as evangelical Christians would get tired of that redundancy or else take the time to define it in a way that is inclusive of all Christians, including those whose approach to scripture interpretation, theology, ecclesiology, personal faith experience, and mission is different from their own. I was pleased to note that one colleague who habitually mentions in public speech that he is an evangelical Christian and the congregation he serves is an evangelical church recently injected a parenthetical clarification after making that claim: "evangelical, meaning there is good news here." That is true to the root meaning of the word. But, of course, that is not how the modifier evangelical is commonly used these days. People who think that the terms Christian and Christianity need the modifier evangelical should consider following the example of Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), considered the founder of the modern notion of the social gospel, whose use of the modifier evangelical does not necessarily exclude Christians whose approach to the Bible and preaching and the church's ministry might vary from his own. The following paragraphs from the brief biography of Rauschenbusch in Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 139-140, are illustrative:

But Rauschenbusch always regarded himself as an evangelist of the truest sort, and he believed that by no means could social redemption supersede personal evangelism: "If the new interest in social questions crowds out the old interest in evangelistic work, it is a reaction from an old one-sidedness into a new one-sidedness. Social redemption must prove its truth and higher spiritual efficiency by presenting stronger motives and working out wiser methods of evangelism than any heretofore. ...Nothing can supersede that great experience when the soul of man consciously turns to God." (n. 23. From "Social Motives to Evangelism" quoted in Sharpe, p. 395.)

Rauschenbusch likewise regarded himself as a preacher of evangelical Christianity. He wrote in *The Watchman*, November 24, 1892:

First of all, and above everything, comes evangelical Christianity. And what do I

mean by that? I mean by that not any particular type of doctrine, but the extension of faith in the crucified and risen Christ, who imparts his spirit to those who believe in him and thereby redeems them from the domination of the flesh and the world and their corruption, and transforms them into spiritual beings, conformed to his likeness and partaking of his life.

It has been largely overlooked that Rauschenbusch regarded the pulpit as the primary medium by which the church had effective power in society. He insisted that the church must preach ethics, emphasizing those parts that deal with property; treat political questions before they become issues; and develop institutionalized church work, as well as probe into the causes of poverty and economic suffering.

Rauschenbusch's understanding and experience of what it means to be an evangelical Christian clearly reflects a kind of Christ mysticism that can be seen in the experience and writings of the apostle Paul and in the homiletic lectures of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It also brings to mind the current expressions "personal faith," "experiential Christianity," and "relational theology." And it brings to mind Knitter's 2009, 14-16, observation that Buddha and Jesus both had personal mystical experiences that led them to differ with the prevailing practice and teaching of Hinduism and Judaism respectively, and to add or reincorporate a key personal element in their respective religious traditions. If a personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ, experiential Christianity, even a kind of Christ mysticism, are each suggestive of what it means to be an evangelical Christian, then I claim it—count me in. But it also seems to me that the expression evangelical Christian is redundant and that non-evangelical Christian is an oxymoron. Of course, similar objections can be made about all sectarian names and claims as to the teachings and practices emphasized in respective "denominations," as if other "denominations" did not teach about or designate elders, bishops, deacons, justification, grace, sanctification, social justice, sovereignty of God, divinity of Christ, gifts of the Spirit; or practice baptism or celebrate the Lord's Supper or experience, preach, and strive to live by the evangel.

[¶18] **There are various perspectives that a person may consider on the**

authority and use of the Bible in faith communities, and there are de facto inner canons in how the Bible is used and interpreted in synagogue and church. And there is inevitably some selectivity in any attempt to apply an ancient text literally in the modern world.

James Sanders 1972, xv, attributes to G. Ernest Wright his own approach to the Bible in *Torah and Canon*, including that the question of authority must be posed on the basis of inherent inner canons in both Old and New Testaments while, like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, he writes that Wright's antagonist, Brevard Childs, is also right: the problem of biblical authority must be broached in full canonical context. Brueggemann 2005, 3-10, presents the authority of the Bible in terms of its power to authorize communities to live and act in certain ways rather than in terms of authorship or ecclesiastically sanctioned canons, which is somewhat like the case made by Dodd 1958 mentioned above. Additional recent (1960's and 1980's) canonical studies are listed by Pagels 2003, n. 10 of Chapter 4, pp. 217-218. Johnson 1996, 169, addresses the question of how the church can recover some sense of canon, community, and creed in the context of the current polarization and distrust between conservative and liberal tendencies within Christianity. N. T. Wright 2005 reviews the history of tension between the church's respect for the authority of Scripture and the church's task of and approaches to the interpretation of Scripture for its meaning in the life and witness of Christians in each new time and setting, and proposes helpful perspectives. An extensive list of mostly conservative writings on "the doctrine of scripture" can be seen in Keller 2015, 244-245. E. P. Sanders' 2005, 243, laconic observation about the situationally calculated response of the Jewish communities to the graven images on Roman coins is revelatory of historic Christian communities as well: "As is always the case, those who followed the Bible literally had to decide when to do so."

[¶19] **The Christian church has a continuous history from its earliest times**

of selecting some sections of scripture for repetitive use and thus for greater attention and emphasis in its reading, teaching, preaching, creedal statements, rituals, and lectionaries.

Old 1998b, 83, notices the importance given by great preachers throughout Christian history, beginning with the spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, of the early centuries of Christianity, to certain key passages of Scripture by doing expository series on the six days of creation, the Song of Solomon, the book of Psalms, the book of Ecclesiastes, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the parables of Jesus. Similarly, according to Skudlarek 1981, 103-105, the gospel lections scheduled for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent in Year A of the three-year lectionaries date from the scrutinies of the catechumens in preparation for baptism on Easter Sunday and should, preferably, be used again in Years B and C. Thus, a canon of *portions* of Scripture frequently set forth in series for liturgical reading and preaching emerged early and has lingered long. Old 1999, 168, assesses the values and limitations of a list of Epistle selections to be used as needed in the summer and fall months, according to the Gelasian lectionaries of the Middle Ages. Skudlarek's 1981, 33, description of the wide-ranging consultation with representative biblical and pastoral scholars of various Christian traditions used in the selection of texts to be in the new 3-year Lectionary for Mass published in 1971 makes clear the fact that the lectionary constitutes a canon within the canon. Sloyan 1977, 131, wrote: "The positive evaluation placed on the material chosen makes a lectionary no less than a new canon." Twenty-three years after that publication Sloyan 2000, 33, discussed this issue in much greater detail and acknowledged that more representative selections such as in the *Book of Common Prayer* and *The Revised Common Lectionary* have made for a "better canon" without departing from the main direction taken by the *Lectionary for Mass* and all previous lectionaries of East and West.

[¶20] **There is a longstanding tradition among Protestant theologians that every passage of the Bible can be an appropriate text for preaching and that any list of the more central or representative texts will be freighted with the theological/ecclesiastical/cultural baggage of the list makers.**

Sloyan's 2000, 33, use of the word representative is consistent with the standard set in the documents of the Vatican II Council: "a more representative portion of holy Scripture will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Article 51; in Abbott 1966, 155, and Hoffman 1991, 20). But some commentators have justly asked: representative of what and whom? Edwards 2004, 743, notes that "lectionaries, for all their merits, are drawn up by representatives of the mainline churches that use them and thus reflect their values; many texts that would raise issues of social justice are never read." Horace T. Allen 1983b, 18, for example, seems to overstate the comprehensiveness of the lectionary selections. Therefore, I do not consider representative to be a sufficient standard nor the three-year cycle to be long enough, especially if in practice that pattern becomes a limit or boundary. I prefer a more comprehensive horizon of possible scripture passages for Sunday worship and proclamation. This preference need not be based on a biblicism that sees every word in the Bible as placed there by God for a particular purpose, a view that Edwards 2004, 41, attributes to Origen. Bonhoeffer 1975, 141, asserts that every text of the Bible has the concreteness that is a necessary factor for proclamation when considered in the context of the whole of Scripture which, according to Luther's presupposition, is unanimous and clear. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer, 157, had his own canon, i.e., guide or rule, for preachers to use in selecting scripture texts for sermons, and, 153, favored limiting the readings in worship services to two, either Old Testament and New Testament or Gospel and Epistle. His proclivities here seem to reflect Luther's impatience with liturgical readings that were not to be expounded in preaching. However, Luther never departed

from the old lectionary that provided for such readings, according to Bieritz 1991, 37-38. Bonhoeffer's "canon" for selecting preaching texts may also reflect the German Lutheran church's distinction between lectionaries for liturgical readings and lists of preaching texts, mentioned in Bieritz 1991, 37, Translator's Note, which I have also referenced in Book II, n. 14. Yet, Bonhoeffer 1975, 161, when emphasizing a need in the church for more frequent preaching from the Old Testament, reiterated that "Basically every biblical text is the text for a sermon, provided it is in the logical context and is not a meaningless fragment by itself, and to the extent that the preacher is able to understand it as the Word of God. In every text stands the One God; in every text the same God speaks. He speaks in Romans 13 as well as in Acts 5:29." And, according to Horace T. Allen 1996, 17, the Reformed tradition (Church-Reformed-Always-Being-Reformed-by-the-Word-of-God, i.e., the Calvinist/Zwinglian side of the Reformation) has included a conviction that any and all passages of scripture in the canon are suitable for reading and exposition in the church's worship. Edwards 2004, 316, notes that part of John Calvin's preference for *lectio continua de scriptura* preaching, that is, preaching in course through books of the Bible, was due to his "theological qualms about chopping the scriptures into liturgical lections. Doing that, he felt, suggested that parts of Scripture were unnecessary, less inspired, and not of a unity with the rest of the canon in their teaching."

[¶21] **The usefulness and appropriateness of any scripture text in serving and testing the church's preaching is related not only to the historical origin of the text but also to the text's continuing history of inclusion and use and meaning in the life of the church.**

If the church's worship and preaching are to be tested in the light of the word of God revealed in Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Old and New Testaments (Barth 1936), and if the authority of the Bible is to be examined in the light of the church's faith and practice throughout Christian history

(Dodd 1958), then no text of the Bible may be justly exempted from the church's worship and preaching lectionaries. Barth 1991, 101, in *after thoughts* to one of his preaching seminar lectures, possibly responding to questions from some of the participants, addressed the matter of texts that are likely not authentic representations of actual events and sayings: "...since I come upon the text in the church, and am called upon to hear *God's* Word in it, no historian's judgment can make this text unserviceable as the Word of God." I think that makes Barth a precursor of the late 20th century program of canonical criticism wherein, according to James Sanders 1984, it is acknowledged that every text in the Bible must have been meaningful to a believing community at some time during historical transmission before the canon was stabilized. It seems to me that regardless of the valuation assigned to a particular section of scripture in one's or a church's inner canon, that valuation should be publicly tested in the process of preaching from that portion of the Bible. There may be a risk of bibliolatry in this position, but perhaps with God's help in a commitment to good workmanship in interpreting the word of truth responsibly that danger can be averted.

[¶22] **It is important to understand as well as possible the distinction between using the word canon in a literal reference to official or ecclesiastically authorized texts of scripture and using the word canon in the metaphorical sense of de facto inner canons created by church practices in reading, interpreting, writing, teaching, and preaching.**

All references to a new canon, a canon within the canon or an inner canon or outer canon are using the word canon in a figurative or metaphorical sense, suggesting a de facto rather than an official change in the canon. Barr 1983, 70-74; 1999, 385, discusses the notion that an inner canon or canon within the canon is established willy nilly or inadvertently by the modern efforts in biblical theology, and Old Testament Theology in particular, to identify essential themes or

perspectives within the Bible that should guide one's interpretation of any and all texts in the Bible. Johnson 1999, 609, notes that the complexity of the canon's organic unity as a collection of writings that are all essential and relevant to the church in different ways in different times and circumstances makes the canon "such an important and intricate organism" that it exposes the concept of a canon within the canon as a fundamentally arrogant proposition. That assessment by Johnson reminds us to recognize and remember the temporal and situational character of any selective lectionary and any choosing of the more essential or more representative portions of scripture, or, for that matter, any selection of a text for worship and preaching on a particular Sunday. Thus, the expressions inner canon, new canon, and canon within the canon must be taken as metaphorical terms of art and not as official designations. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a selective lectionary that is repeated cycle after cycle becomes, effectually, practically, and metaphorically, a de facto inner canon. Since a de facto inner canon is unavoidable no matter how texts are selected for reading and preaching in worship, it is essential that texts be interpreted in preaching in light of and in relation to the whole canon, and, as Johnson, 21-153, indicates, in light of and in relation to historical human experience and, 611, with a communal or ecclesial hermeneutic. West 1997, 27, observes that the lectionary "does not so much displace the canon as offer a focused interpretation of it," which is somewhat akin to Sloyan's conclusion, referenced above, that the three-year lectionaries are sufficiently representative of the entire canon for purposes of Lord's Day services.

[¶23] **Churches of the Catholic liturgical paradigm may tend toward making the de facto canon of the lectionary an official canon. But the more porous and flexible use of lectionaries by churches of the Protestant liturgical paradigm does not guarantee that their preaching will address "the whole counsel of God."**

The Roman Catholic Church's detailed provisions of when a priest may and may not make choices of readings, such as when a feast day provides readings different from those in the daily lectionary, and exactly how those choices should and should not be made, practically turn the lectionaries and the instructions into an *official* canon within the canon and not just an inner canon in a practical or metaphorical sense. Articles 319 and 325 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (1975), in Hoffman 1991, 98 & 100, constitute a case in point. But the discussion in Sloyan 1991, 121-122, seems to suggest that, in practice, parish priests and liturgy committees may take more liberty in varying from the prescribed readings than is indicated in the *General Instruction* articles cited above. Also, Horace T. Allen 1996, 13, fairly rhapsodizes over the development of the three-year lectionaries and the preaching based on them as being a work and achievement very like that of the early church teachers establishing the canon! That rhapsody brings to mind James Sanders' 1984, 21-45, dynamic concept of canon as a process that continues in the church's reading, teaching and preaching even after the canon as the church's sacred and authoritative scripture has been stabilized. However, Sanders, in 1983, 260-263, had actually made a specific proposal for developing a lectionary that is more consistent with the whole of the stabilized canon and with the continuing canonical process of God's ongoing Story and our ongoing story than the three-year lectionaries. Selecting a canon within the canon is necessitated by the decision to limit the lectionary cycle to three years. A pastoral reason is claimed for that decision by the Vatican II Council along with respect for several ancient traditions: short enough so that people can become familiar with the rhythm of the cycle and by repetition gain familiarity with "the more essential parts" of Scripture, so writes Bonneau 1998, 36, citing the work of *Coetus XI*, post Vatican II Council. West 1997, 36-37, acknowledges the purpose and value of reading and hearing the more essential or "classic" texts repeatedly in a fixed cycle (also

referenced in Book II Introduction [¶ 3]). But West also notes, 84-85, citing Northrup Frye, that such texts become iconic, frozen, or static so that any movement or narrativity within the text is obscured or ignored. Yet Edwards 2004, 672-673, affirms the dictum of Stratman 1983 that truly pastoral preaching must encompass the whole truth of God which requires preaching from the whole Bible and not just from selected portions. But merely scheduling or opening the way to using more passages of scripture in worship and preaching does not insure that the preaching will address “the full range of biblical teaching,” to use a phrase that Edwards 2004, 715, used in his reportage of Gardner C. Taylor’s Lyman Beecher Lecture 4, “Preaching the Whole Counsel of God.” Taylor 1977, 77, attributes that title and subject matter of his fourth Beecher lecture to George Buttrick in his commencement address at Taylor’s graduation from Oberlin Graduate School of Theology, in which Buttrick declared the importance of preaching the full-orbed Gospel (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 43]).

[¶24] **The educational and inculturational values of key or essential texts being repeated in a one-year or three-year liturgical cycle can be partially preserved in a sixteen-year lectionary by the annual thematic cycle of the Christological half of the year and by the interpretation of scripture with scripture in teaching and preaching.**

It is the intention of *The Open Bible Lectionary* presented in Book II that by arranging the Gospel lections in sixteen half-years according to the redemption themes of the Christological part of the liturgical year the values of repeating the “more essential” Christian teachings on an annual basis will be preserved. That is, even though particular texts are not repeated annually or triennially, the major *themes* of God’s saving work do recur annually and are supported by a much wider array of texts. Preachers will, as with all Christian year lectionaries, be required to balance basic exegetical work with the intentions of the seasons and special feast days, and will have frequent

opportunities to quote from the “classic texts” by way of interpreting scripture with scripture, as I have noted in Book II Introduction [¶ b.2]. And, of course, those classic texts that appear in the four Gospels are scheduled for reading and exposition once every sixteen years, in addition to some reinforcement by way of Gospel parallels. As Dodd 1962, 78, pointed out, selection (and exclusion) is a treacherous enterprise, whether a free-range preacher choosing the most preachable text for the day or a church commission devising a table of Sunday readings to be repeated every three years. Thus, the limitation of the lectionary to three years of Sundays sacrificed a sense among the people of the Reformed tradition, i.e., Church-Reformed-Always-Being-Reformed-By-the-Word-of-God tradition (Calvinist/Zwinglian side of the Reformation), noted in Horace T. Allen 1996, 17, that the entire canon is fit for reading and preaching in Sunday morning worship. The specific criteria for inclusion (and exclusion) of pericopes in the lectionary for Sunday service of word and sacrament as propounded in the Vatican II *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* are a kind of official inner canon, but only for liturgical purposes. The criteria are summarized in Bonneau 1998, 26-27. Other criteria are given in *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981) in Hoffman 1991, 127-164, and those are summarized in Bonneau 1998, 49-51.

[¶25] **The primacy of the Gospel lections in liturgical year lectionaries and the status of the Gospels as the primal narrative of the Christian movement are not based on the chronology of the writing—the Epistles were written earlier and are thus closer to the earliest church’s communal memory of Jesus’ life and ministry and its meaning for the life of faith of the church than the Gospel writings. Rather, the liturgical primacy of the Gospels in Christian history is based on the augmentation of the meaning of the word gospel in Mark 1:1 and on the canonical order of the writings in the New Testament as received, and, to some extent, on the Eucharistic liturgical focus of those church traditions that develop and use lectionaries.**

The fact that the principal readings are all from the Gospels tends to treat the four Gospels as a

canon within the canon of New Testament scriptures. Borg 2001, 189, makes a case for viewing the four Gospels as the primal or foundational narratives of the Christian movement and of first importance in much the same way as the story of the exodus is the primal narrative of ancient Israel, because they tell the story of Jesus. And, of course, he goes on, 191, to discuss how the historical-metaphorical approach to the Bible can help us to read the four Gospels as the primal narrative of the early Christian movement. Thus, he seems to justify or at least provide a rationale for the fact that the four Gospels have come to be treated as a kind of canon within the canon of the New Testament in some parts of Christian history and practice, that is, those Christian traditions that follow lectionaries in which the Gospel lection has primacy; even though most of the other parts of the New Testament writings predate the writing of the Gospels and actually contain more gospel as gospel, the good news of salvation by grace through faith, than do the Gospels, and, in fact, the letters of Paul seem to be treated as a canon within the canon of the New Testament in preaching traditions that have not historically followed a lectionary, as is noted by Lowry 1992, 66-67. Borg's 2001, 227-296, application of the historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach to the life, work, and writings of Paul and the book of Revelation makes it clear that while the four Gospels may fairly be treated as the primal narrative of the Christian Way, that is, the story of the appearing of the Messiah in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the meaning of the gospel in the four Gospels simply cannot be fully understood and experienced apart from the meaning and experience of the gospel in the life and letters of the apostles, especially Paul, and also the apocalyptic vision and writings of John the theologian in exile on the island of Patmos. On the other hand, Horace T. Allen 1983a, 16, notes that the theme of the eucharistic context which pervades the lectionary criteria of the Vatican II *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* is "the single most significant factor in the dominance of the Gospel lesson as the

controlling lesson.” That might seem strange from a literary chronology perspective considering that in so many worship books the words of the institution of the Lord’s Supper are from the account of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 rather than from a synoptic Gospel, the writers of which might have actually borrowed language from Paul, the earlier writer. But, of course, the celebration of the Thankful Meal is not simply about the memory of the last supper nor just about the sacrificial death of Christ, but it is about the entirety of God’s saving work in the life, death, resurrection and continuing presence of the Christ and anticipation of the promised reunion feast of all humankind at the ultimate consolidation of God’s rule. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (1975) Articles 34-35 in Hoffman 1991, 56, have the special place of the Gospel readings marked by ceremony and who gets to read them. Also, in Hoffman 1991, the elevated ceremonial of the reading (or “proclamation”) of the Gospel lections is addressed in *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981), Articles 13 & 17, p.131, and, in the same volume, Sloyan’s *Overview* pp. 117-123. James Sanders 1984, 42-43, discusses the possible usefulness and definite limitations from the perspective of canonical process of some recent scholarly publications that highlight the “alleged chronological order of composition” of books of the Bible as distinct from “their received canonical sequence,” including some introductions to the Bible and even a reordering of the books of the Bible in some modern translations. Thus, we may say that the primacy of the Gospels in the three-year lectionaries, and thus in the chief Sunday services whether with or without Holy Communion, is consistent with their received canonical sequence but not with the chronological order of their composition, nor with the basic meaning of the word gospel prior to its augmentation in Mark 1:1. (I have references to Johnson 1999 and G. Ernest Wright 1952 on the New Testament’s introduction of gospel as a new literary genre in Chapter III [¶ 11] and in Book II Introduction [¶ b.3].)

[¶26] **The long-standing subordination of Old Testament and Epistle lections to the Gospel lections in the organization of lectionaries in sets of four (quires) scripture passages for Sunday worship and preaching, along with a Protestant tradition of preaching from Old Testament and Epistle texts, sometimes freely selected per Sunday and sometimes in continuous series, led to the Roman Catholic church's opting out of actually using the Common Lectionary on a trial basis even though their representatives had been involved in the development of that lectionary and their American bishops had requested permission from the Holy See to join in that trial use.**

Langford 1993, 40, indicates the reason for the rejection of trial use of *Common Lectionary* of 1983 by the Holy See in Rome when requested by the American bishops: "Roman Catholic reluctance to engage in ecumenical dialogue about its own lectionary principles, especially the role of the Old Testament in the service of Word and Table, advocated in its 1969 lectionary. Because the Romans emphasized the centrality of the Eucharist in their liturgy, they believed that sermons should be based on the Gospels, and subsequently that Old Testament lessons must be directly linked with the Gospel readings." But this was not new with Vatican II. Old 2007, 124-125, notes that Claus Harms (1778-1885) thought the lectionary emphasis on the synoptic Gospels led to undue support of the moralism of enlightenment preachers and, like Luther, he thought that whoever selected the Epistle readings of the lectionary must have been a friend of works righteousness. Brilioth 1965a, 74, notes that "the ceremonial emphasis on the reading of the Gospel was common to both Roman and Gallican rites." So, making the Gospels a canon within the New Testament canon goes back to the Middle Ages and even earlier: Maxwell 1949, 3, notes that Origen described the Gospels as "the crown of all scripture."

[¶27] **The primacy of the Gospels in the lectionaries may have a tendency to weight the interpretation of scripture generally and the development of**

sermons in particular toward the story or narrative of the gospel in the life and mission of Jesus and, thus, to soft-pedal the interpretation of the scripture and the character of preaching as address to the hearers as an announcement of good news and an overt call for a response and a change of heart and a transformation of life.

According to Craddock 1983, 113-118, the primacy of the Gospels in the lectionaries has hermeneutical ramifications with regard to the tension between the narrative character of the Gospels and the kerygmatic character of the Epistles (Joseph Sittler) and the viewing of scripture as content or as address (Karl Barth). Jenson 1982, 110, puts it this way: “The Reformation’s proposed dogma...instructs that the text is and the sermon is to be existential address, ‘law and gospel.’” And he discusses, 110-113, some of the ways that this teaching may be worked out in the context of the preacher’s modern exegetical work and the conversation between preacher and hearers as they address each other with the word of “law and gospel” in Jesus Christ. And in 2011, 22, Craddock reports a similar debate between C. H. Dodd and Rudolph Bultmann, whether the shape of the gospel is essentially a story or essentially an address calling for decision, which Craddock handily resolves with a both/and, not an either/or: we have the gospel as narrative in the Gospels and the gospel as address in the Epistles. Johnson 1999, 160, credits Mark with the seminal contribution of enlarging the word gospel to mean not only a message, the good news of salvation through the death and resurrection of the savior (as in the Epistles) but also a literary medium as well as a message, namely the medium of a narrative account of the life, death, and resurrection of the savior (which I reference again in Chapter III [¶ 11, ¶ 12] and in Book II, n. 18 [¶ 2]). So, we should acknowledge that story and address cannot be so discretely separated. Phifer 1965, 68, discusses how the primacy of the Gospels survived in the liturgy under Bucer’s leadership in Strasbourg even when the lectionary was dismissed. Lowry 1992, 66-67, notes a perceived divide among Protestants between evangelical preachers favoring the imperative

exhortations of the Gospels and pastors in the Reformation tradition focusing sharply on Paul. I take it that “Reformation tradition” includes both the Evangelical (Lutheran) and the Reformed (Calvinist) sides of the Reformation and that “evangelical preachers” are modern self-designated evangelicals who favor a fundamentalist or orthodox interpretation of scripture and of basic Christian doctrines. Dodd 1962 [1937] discusses gospel in the Epistles and gospel in the Gospels.

[¶28] **Some twentieth century scripture scholars agreed that shifting tides in theology generally and in biblical studies in particular tend inevitably to produce inner canons of interpretation, but they had different perspectives as to which inner canons have more integrity with the whole of scripture and with present reality and which inner canons may be more distorting and subject to abuse.**

James Sanders 1972, 56, indicates that in Judaism, the Pentateuchal Torah has been treated more or less from time to time as a canon within the canon of the Hebrew Bible. Barr 1983, 50-52, 152-158, questions whether it is correct to write of a canonization process with respect to the Hebrew Bible. James Sanders 1984, 15-20, discusses light from the Dead Sea Scrolls (which he sometimes calls the Judean Scrolls) and other modern archaeological findings at various sites of ancient Hebrew communities on stages in the gradual settling of the text of the Hebrew Scriptures, during which the text was not only fluid but also pluralistic regarding sectarian and language differences in those communities. But he does not suggest that there was any final or official canonization. The expressions “canon within the canon” and “inner canon” have been used with respect to various scholarly approaches that tend to downgrade or upgrade portions of the canonical scriptures as being less worthy or more central and controlling in hermeneutics and in liturgical and pedagogical usage among Christian communities. James Sanders 1984, 31, reports that Brevard Childs, in works that Sanders cites, had criticized three Old Testament scholars for making a canon within the canon: von Rad by his emphasis on the creeds in the

Hebrew text, G. Ernest Wright by his use of the chronical and festal recitals as a controlling hermeneutic tool, and Zimmerli by his identification of passages that refer to earlier settled texts as commentary rather than as scriptural texts on a par with the older texts to which they refer. Many scholars have criticized the 20th century biblical theology movement as striving to produce a canon within the canon. But Childs 1992, 67-8, and 214, thinks that his own approach avoids this pitfall, while faulting the work of Ernst Kasemann for falling into it. It is generally recognized that both Calvin and Luther, in criticizing or even dismissing certain books of the Bible, came close to having a canon within the canon. Thompson 1971, 411, 417, demonstrates that John Wesley's esteem for the Anglican *Prayer Book*, and the Bible, did not prevent his excising from the Sunday Service whole Psalms and parts of others as being "highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation," citing Wesley's letter from Bristol, September 9, 1784. James Sanders 1972, xv, cites G. Ernest Wright as debating Childs about his assertion of a canon within the canon in both Old and New Testaments. Bailey 1977, 150, cites Barr as discussing problems with the idea of an inner canon. Barr 1999, 380-387, refers to G. Ernest Wright and others of the earlier biblical theology movement regarding their acknowledgement of a de facto inner canon based on usage among scholars and Christians in general, and 387 ff. concerning the avoidance of acknowledging such an inner canon in the later approach of Childs. G. Ernest Wright's own discussion of an inner canon can be seen in 1952, 102-105 and 1969, 179-183, which sections are referenced by Barr in the discussion mentioned above. Wright 1969, 166-185, in his chapter on "The Canon as a Theological Problem" is helpful in putting the matter of a theologically based inner canon in a historical and pragmatic context. As Barr points out, Wright does not specify an inner canon in the Old Testament but only asserts that an implicit inner canon in the work of biblical scholars and theologians is inevitable and that it changes with

developments in theology, which Wright indicates, 169-180, are sometimes influenced by new discoveries of ancient manuscripts. Barr 1983, 137-142, discusses the impossibility of a strictly biblical theology since theology must say something about God and that requires taking a vantage point from outside the Bible unless God is to be strictly confined to a book; and he discusses Barth's disconnection from biblical scholarship reflected in his commentary on Romans, and G. E. Wright's waxing and waning in his sense of affinity between his own work and that of Barth.

[¶29] N. T. Wright 1992, 21, cautions against the tendency to develop an inner canon by trying to identify a "theology" based on some portion of the New Testament text, such as "the theology of Paul." Yet, he notes, 22, that everyone comes to a text with some kind of an "inner canon," that is, the inevitable subjectivism of the questions we bring to the encounter. Dodd 1958, 10, had also asserted the inevitability of de facto inner canons resulting from hermeneutical discrimination and selectivity in all bands of the spectrum of theological ilk. Edwards 2004, 722, cites Thomas Hoyt on the necessity for preachers to look for a hermeneutical key that will unlock the meaning of scripture even though such a key often becomes an inner canon for the interpreter. West 1997, x, discusses the hermeneutic inclinations (Catholic, Protestant, and ecumenical) in the selection and scheduling of texts in the three-year lectionaries. James Sanders 1993, 16, notes that "Luke had his canon within the canon just as everyone and, indeed, every denomination does." Buttrick 1994b, 124, n. 86, suggests that John Calvin is implicated in such a theological narrowing of the canon. However, Brueggemann 2005, 86, cites Claus Westermann's proposal of a revised approach to Old Testament theology which includes: "(3) a readiness to take seriously all of the texts of the Old Testament, including those that do not fit the regnant construct" (also referenced in n. 17 [¶ 1]). But it seems to me that Westermann's recasting of the assumptions of Old Testament theology is an *example* of G. Ernest Wright's 1969, 166-185, point of an inevitable

inner canon based on the currently ruling theological perspective, rather than an *exception* to it, since Westermann's theological perspective cannot be based on *all* texts of the Old Testament any more than was the work of von Rad and Wright. Brueggemann, 86-87, goes on to discuss how Westermann's new direction tends to neutralize or open up the von Rad and Wright polemic against Israel's religious environment—"Canaanite fertility religion"—by recognizing some commonalities between Israel's God-in-historical-epic and Canaan's God-in-fertility-myth and how Westermann's new construct is supported by Frank Moore Cross's book *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* even though the title is voiced in the either/or construct of von Rad and Wright. Nevertheless, it seems to me that if Westermann's proposal leads to a new regnant construct, it will only confirm rather than refute or weaken Wright's 1969, 166-185, discussion to the effect that there is always in theological approaches to the Bible an inner canon based on the regnant construct, that is, the currently dominant theological/hermeneutic perspective. Seventeen years before his 1969 discussion of practical inner canons, G. Ernest Wright 1952, 16-19, had pointed out in his chapter on "The Church's Need of the Old Testament," modern examples of de facto inner canons in the mission work of the churches that tended to ignore the Old Testament, including the widespread distribution, e.g., to WW II soldiers and college students, of volumes containing only the New Testament and Psalms (American Bible Society and Gideons International). Notably, Wright, 17, attributes the church's neglect of the Old Testament and especially its failure to integrate the Old Testament meaningfully into its worship, preaching, and study, partly to the lack of significant output by Old Testament scholars in the period immediately following a high-water mark of achievement established between 1890 and 1910. That lack, of course, was beginning to be remedied about the time that Wright, born in 1909, came of age. Another example of a de facto inner canon that neglects the Old Testament was illuminated when

Protestant liturgiologists went to work adapting the 1970 *Lectionary for Mass* to make a common lectionary; that is, a light was shone on the fact that the Roman Catholic preaching tradition has not ordinarily included the practice of using an Old Testament passage as the principal text for developing a sermon. And even in the 1981 revised edition of *Lectionary for Mass*, the Old Testament lections, like the Epistle lections, are mainly used to supplement the development of sermons on a principal text from a Gospel lection. I have commented in Book II Introduction on what I see as the inadequacy of efforts to remedy this deficient use of the Old Testament and the Epistles in the three-year lectionaries by providing a few series of semi-continuous Old Testament and Epistle lections as liturgical reading courses that could possibly be used as principal lections for sermon development. On the other hand, James Sanders 1984, 40-43, in his chapter on “Canonical Process,” discusses the matter of Israel’s contest with its religious environment in terms of an ongoing “monotheizing” of its own theology in the midst of the predominantly polytheistic culture of which Israel was a part, and how vestiges of both “monotheizing” and “polytheizing” continue to show up in the Bible as an aspect of the canonical process that characterized the developmental and transmission stages of the scriptural writings. The matter of an inner canon based on hermeneutical approaches that have influenced choices and pairings of texts in the development of the three-year lectionaries is discussed by James Sanders 1983, 257-263, and by Horace T. Allen in the response that follows Sanders’ article in the same place, 264-268. West 1997, 66, implies that the Bible itself is a canon within the larger “canon” of early Christian source documents (some extant only in fragments and some no longer extant and only hypothetically known to have existed), and observes that just as the lectionaries “interpret” the Bible by selection, so the Bible “interprets” the larger body of Christian writings by selection.

[¶30] Bonneau 1998, 49, acknowledges the lectionary constitutes a canon within the canon but

avers that the Sunday Eucharist cannot pretend to be the first and foremost occasion for the faithful to be exposed to and to become familiar with the scriptures. He seems to be assuming that there is a great amount of ongoing biblical education in the church's catechetical programs. Or, as Skudlarek 1981 puts it, the Sunday morning liturgy is not primarily an occasion for catechesis. That is certainly true and comports with the observation in the "Lectionary for Mass: Introduction" (1981) Number 61 in Hoffman 1991, 139, that "the celebration of the liturgy is not in itself simply a form of catechesis, but it does contain an element of teaching." On the other hand, Blackwood 1942 features an educational preaching ministry as one of the main values of a planned schedule of texts for Sunday worship. Robert McAfee Brown 1994a, b, flips the discussion of the lectionary as a canon within the canon by pointing out that the short list of *ad hoc* selected preaching texts favored by free-range, topical, thematic, situational, and issue-oriented preachers constitutes a canon within the canon for which the three-year lectionaries are a welcome corrective and widening of the scriptural horizon. Ronald Allen 1998, 112-113, discusses some of the values and limitations of "Free Selection of Texts." As James Sanders 1983, 257, wrote, lectionaries "can cause the interpreter or preacher to read unfamiliar passages and move outside one's own canon-within-the-canon of favorite passages." Yet this does not mean that one should *avoid* preaching on the great and familiar texts, a point acknowledged by Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 20-21, Craddock 1983, 104-105, and Horace T. Allen 1996, 16-17. West 1997, 36-39, also encourages a due attention to the great and familiar texts in his discussion of "classic texts" for liturgical reading and preaching, a concept which he attributes to the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer.

[¶31] I have further discussion of canon in Chapter II, including the function of canonical criticism in biblical hermeneutics.

CHAPTER II

Interpretation - Biblical Hermeneutics: A Necessary Discipline for the Work of Homiletic Theology, Sermon Development, and Preaching in Christian Worship

[¶1] **The Bible is a historical document that contains a written record of the witness of people of faith to God’s self-revelation in history. The Bible becomes the word of God when by the Spirit’s gift of faith God speaks to people through the witness of scripture. But the Bible becomes an idol when it is taken to be the word of God apart from the seal of the Spirit in the faith experience of readers, hearers, students, interpreters, teachers, and preachers.**

Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 99-100, remark on the irony of Barth’s “homiletic fundamentalism”—nothing in the sermon but the Word of God reiterated—and that Barth “has been the subject of mindless attacks by fundamentalists.” A further irony is seen in Buttrick’s 1991, 9, observation that “Because of his stubborn reverence for the Bible, Barth has been embraced enthusiastically by many moderating fundamentalists in recent years.” Tillich 1951, 3, identifies American fundamentalism with European orthodoxy. That assertion is only understandable if one probes deeper than the use of the word fundamentalism in common parlance today, often referring to a kind of global biblical literalism without any awareness that the word fundamental refers to an acknowledgement of symbol and metaphor in the biblical language while at the same time insisting that there are five fundamental biblical teachings essential to the Christian faith, “doctrines” that assert examples of interventions by God into the natural order of the universe. Perhaps one who studies to get a familiarity with the history of the fundamentalist versus modernist controversies in the church councils, the universities and seminaries, the public schools, and the courts in the United States in the early twentieth century can join with Tillich in

seeing how that divide is like the earlier and longer-standing one between 19th century theological orthodoxy and liberalism in Europe following the introduction of the historical-critical approach to biblical interpretation launched mainly by the work of scholars at the University of Tübingen in Germany. Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 102, citing Barth 1954 and Arnold B. Come 1963, have an illuminating discussion of Barth's assertion that "Christianity is only a living religion when it is 'not ashamed actually to be in all seriousness a book religion.'" To wit: "The Bible is the only direct witness to the revelation in Christ, and the church stands to lose its very faith unless it holds to the 'Israelitish concern' for the sentence, word, and letter." "This does not mean that Barth had a fundamentalist view of Scripture; The Bible shows the 'acts' of God as he revealed himself in Christ. Barth recognized the humanity of the biblical authors; he believed that man discovers behind the fallible words their infallible truth. Barth believed in preaching as explanation of the text of Scripture in order that man might have an existential encounter with the living Word." Thus, it seems that Barth's so-called Word of God theology can be very friendly with the assertion in G. Ernest Wright 1952, 12, that "Christian theology has tended to think of the Bible chiefly as 'the Word of God,' though in point of fact a more accurate title would be 'the Acts of God.'" The above citation of Fant and Pinson with Arnold B. Come is a useful clarification of Barth's perspective on the words of the Bible, but the word explanation does not accurately describe his treatment of the Bible in his preaching and his teaching in the homiletics seminars recorded in *The Preaching of the Gospel* 1963 based on notes of his students and in *Homiletics* 1991 based on Barth's own lecture notes, according to David Buttrick's foreword in 1991. Barth insisted not that the sermon should explain the scripture passage but rather that it should follow the lines of the scripture passage in the preacher's own free speech to real live people. Perhaps paraphrase would be more descriptive of

Barth's preaching design than explain. As Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 103, note: "The truth is, in practice Barth himself rarely dealt with the historical context of his text; nevertheless, his preaching does show careful exposition," where the word exposition should be understood more in the sense of setting forth or laying down the message and less in the sense of explaining the text (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 22]). Bonhoeffer 1972, 280, 286, in his 30 April and 5 May 1944 letters to Eberhard Bethge comments on Barth's achievement and limitations, wherein, 286, he credits Barth with being the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion, that is, religion in the sense of, 280, "the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on," and, 280, the only one to have started along the line of thought of a religionless Christianity. But he faults Barth for failing to carry that line of thought through to completion but rather resorting to, 286, "a positivist doctrine of revelation which says, in effect 'like it or lump it': virgin birth, Trinity, or anything else; each is an equally significant and necessary part of the whole, which must simply be swallowed as a whole or not at all." But the problem and danger of making an idol out of the Bible and one's own scriptural concentration is far older than the 20th century biblical theology movement and Barth's word of God theology. Lischer 2001, 59, wrote "Bibliolatry, said Luther, worships the cradle instead of the Christ child in it. Jesus meant the same when he said 'you study the scriptures diligently, supposing that in having them you have eternal life; yet, although their testimony points to me, you refuse to come to me for that life' (John 5:39-40 NEB)." And Lischer points to the trailhead of a hermeneutical path toward avoiding such a narrow focus on textual exegesis: "A biblical sermon is an exposition of the Scripture, which is an exposition of the gospel, which is an exposition of the life of God." Wilson 2007, 35, touts his gospel hermeneutic (247-250) as a curb against bibliolatry: "The gospel is contained in the Bible..." and "one needs the entire Bible to communicate it

adequately. It is not narrowly confined to the New Testament; the good news is found wherever God acts with saving power...As Luther said, the Bible is the manger where Christ is laid; if one seeks the *gospel* in Scripture one may avoid making an idol of the Bible” (emphasis added). Willimon 1981, 17, does not use the term biblicism with reference to Barth and the biblical theology movement but he characterizes their view of Scripture as unbiblical—rather priestly and mystical. One definition of biblicism is given in Childs 1992, 705: “using a certain understanding of a section of Scripture as a ‘simple guide’ for our conduct today.” That would be old-timey biblicism of the same kind as mere Bible distribution, Bible toting, Bible thumping, and Bible proof-texting for which Deiss 1976, 265, proposes historical-critical Bible study as an effective antidote, as does Niedenthal 1980, 77-78. Yet Deiss and Niedenthal clearly recognize that the preacher must have a liturgical/homiletic theological target and guide beyond historical-critical scripture study in order to proclaim good news in a worshiping community rather than turn the service of the word into a sterile, or at best a stimulating, Bible lecture.

[¶2] **God chose to use fallible human scribes to communicate God’s eternal spiritual Word in temporal material written words.**

Old fashioned biblicism or bibliolatry, it seems to me, includes any approach to or use of Scripture that tends to deny or controvert God’s choice of communicating his Word incarnationally. I recognize that when I say that “God chose” to provide the written witness to his providence in the history of Israel and the life and work of Jesus incarnationally, that is, through human witnesses whose words reflect finite and fallible human worldviews and human cultures, I am speaking of God in anthropomorphic terms. But I accept this use of anthropomorphic references to God as part and parcel of the language of the Bible and the biblical faith and of what Borg 2001, 49-51, calls a postcritical naiveté in our life of faith, our

walk and conversation with God and with our fellow believers and with the world. Willimon 1981, 17, observes that it is most unbiblical to deny or overlook the incarnational or historically contextualized nature of Scripture; and Fant 1975, 40, reports Bonhoeffer's assessment of the historical critical approach to scripture as part and parcel of the "humiliation" of Christ in his taking flesh and dwelling among us and being whipped and spat upon and crucified. (Both references are also cited in Chapter I [¶ 15].) That is, just as God chose to reveal his Word in the form of a truly human being in Jesus of Nazareth, so God chose to reveal his Word in truly human words, words spoken and written by human beings with all of the limitations and blemishes and historical and cultural contextualization that are ever present in human language. What this means for our understanding of the oral genesis of the church's memory of Jesus Christ that is recorded in the disparate and sometimes confused, confusing, and even contradictory witnesses of the New Testament is usefully illustrated by Johnson 1999, 142-144, in several paragraphs describing how a family might orally share their memories of Grandma, their recently departed matriarch, including some slightly, or even widely, divergent memories of the same episode and its context along with some mutual corrections and some confessed vagueness, paraphrasing, and stumbling self-correction. He also describes how these repeatedly shared memories may become briefer, more consistent, and more formulaic over time and, thus, more structured to accomplish certain teaching purposes in the retelling. And I would add that in this way later generations in the family may come to a genuine, if indirect, acquaintanceship with the great grandma whom they never met in the flesh. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 30, wrote, "The interpreter of Scripture must remember that he is interpreting a literature whose style reflects the modes of thought of each of the epochs represented in it and of each of the authors who contributed to it." Barth 1991, 99, taught in his homiletics seminars in the 1930's: "We

know very well that the Bible *is* a historical document, but that it only is this also. In the whole sphere of revelation the truth holds good that the Word became flesh. It really became a historical document.” That is what I mean by God’s incarnational choice with regard to the scriptures as the written witness to his self-revelation in the saga of Israel and the saga of Jesus. Borg 2001 and 2003 seems to disagree with Barth’s “also” or both/and approach by affirming that the Bible is a human product rather than a divine product. Yet he also affirms, 2003, 46, that the human writers were people of faith and inspired by God. Some might say that makes the Bible a product of both divine origin and human origin, just as is Jesus the incarnate one. But Borg’s point is that people not words are inspired by the Spirit of God. He spells this out in the following paragraph:

Within the emerging paradigm, inspiration refers to the movement of the Spirit in the lives of the people who produced the Bible. The emphasis is not upon words inspired by God, but on *people* moved by their experience of the Spirit, namely, these ancient communities and the individuals who wrote for them.

Johnson 1999, 610-611, mentions several different understandings of what is meant by divine inspiration in reference to prophecy, testimony, and authority in Scripture and how the Spirit of God works in and with human authors and their time-conditioned words and symbols (also cited in Chapter I [¶ 14]). James Sanders 1984, 21-45, in a passage that I reference more fully below [¶ 43], describes divine inspiration in a canonical process where the Holy Spirit is at work among believing communities as they shape and reshape the writings until they become stabilized and are recognized as sacred scripture. Borg 2003 more explicitly combines his 2001, 37-53, two-dimensional historical-metaphorical approach to the Bible (an approach that is compatible with both faith and unfaith) with his 2001, 21-36, sacramental approach to the Bible as an outward sign and pathway toward an inward experience of something more than history and metaphor, that is, the experience of the sacred, that is, in the case of the Christian faith, a relationship with God. By

thus attaching his sacramental view to his historical-metaphorical view Borg 2003 describes a three-dimensional approach to the Bible as he walks in the Christian Way as a person of faith himself: historical-metaphorical-sacred.

[¶3] **Festival and teaching practices of ancient Israel reflected in the Hebrew Bible have the form of recital of what God has done in history, what God is doing in the present and what God promises to do in the future. And that is part of the foundation of narrativity and story in Jewish and Christian teaching and worship today.**

When it comes to Buttrick's 1994b., 5-12, assigning part of the blame to the biblical theology movement for a narrow exegetical or explanatory approach that avoids contemporary issues of social justice among some preachers who follow the lectionary (which I discuss further in Chapter III [¶ 3]) a correction is in order. Buttrick should have referenced an abuse or a misreading of the biblical theology movement rather than simply the movement itself. In fact, the biblical theology movement, by lifting up the Hebraic mode of theology as recital which is in the subtitle of G. Ernest Wright 1952, as distinguished from the Hellenic mode of theology as propositional teachings, should be credited with contributing to the groundwork for the development of narrative theology, narrative hermeneutics and narrative approaches to preaching, all of which are incorporated in Buttrick's 1987 great work *Homiletic*. According to Wright 1952, 13, 28, 66-76, biblical theology emulates a key aspect of the form of cultic ritual in the major festivals in ancient Israel which is also a key aspect of the form of the preaching and teaching of the Christian apostles and the earliest Christian confessions of faith, that is, the form of the confessional (faith-based) recital of the redemptive acts of God in a particular history, because "history is the chief medium of revelation." Wright, 108-109, having acknowledged the necessary function of Christian philosophy and systematic theology in translating the Biblical faith into the non-Biblical

language of another age—extending the Bible into the non-Biblical world—wrote “Nevertheless, the suspicion still remains that the systematic presentation of abstract dogma cannot and should not be the primary teaching method of the Church. In part this is because propositional dogmatics lacks the colour, the flexibility, the movement of the Bible because it attempts to freeze into definite, prosaic, rationality that which was never intended by the Bible to be frozen and which by its very nature cannot be so construed.” Yet, he began this discussion, 108, by acknowledging the limitations of a strictly story-telling approach to church teaching: “We live in an age which needs and demands something more than a series of interpreted stories.” Since that statement was published in 1952 and in the context of highlighting the historiographic and narrative character of the Bible it is not a critique of the illustration-heavy, story-telling habit of some of the popular twentieth century preachers nor of the later narrative thrusts in theology, hermeneutics, and preaching. Rather, if I may paraphrase and expand Prof. Wright’s sentence: We live in an age when Christian teaching and preaching that merely recites and then explains the stories of the Bible will not be adequate to communicate the life-lessons of the Christian faith to people of modern/postmodern thought ways, still imbued as we are by the Greek cosmos conviction and Hellenic ways of thinking. Thus, Wright’s statement is not a witness against narrative approaches to communication but against teaching and preaching that is narrowly textual and exegetical and suffers from what Eugene Lowry 1997 has called “explanatory blight” and what, according to Lowry and Wilson 2007, Thomas Oden has called “bone-dry” preaching. On the other hand, Lischer 2001, 16-29, does criticize a too casual use of contemporary stories intended to help communicate the meaning of God’s Story when he indicates that the heart and power of Christian preaching is in the proclamation (recital) of God’s mighty action in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and not in our personal experience of “resurrection living” as we deal with life’s tragedies

and the common struggles of everyday living, as important as our own subjective life stories may be in reciting God's objective Story as attested in biblical history. The telling of our stories must serve rather than replace or detract from the telling of God's Story.

[¶4] **The Christian Way is a spiritual path that begins with spiritual rebirth, and it has commonalities at the core, and differences of form, with the transformation experiences and spiritual paths of other enduring religions.**

Borg 2001, 215-217, makes clear that while Christianity has in common with other enduring religions that it is not simply a matter of believing in or subscribing to certain teachings but a matter of walking in a certain way or following a certain path in relationship with God, but also that other religions have in common with Christianity that walking in a new way or following a spiritual path begins with an experience of dying spiritually to an old way of being and living and being resurrected or reborn to a new way of being, a new path of life. Borg quotes a Hindu professor's sermon given in a Christian seminary in showing how this commonality of a major concept at the heart of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism can be taken to neutralize the alienating exclusivism that is sometimes attached to the words of Jesus in John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus *is* the way, the way of death and new life. And that is precisely the spiritual transformation that is at the heart of the five religions mentioned, and perhaps others as well. Borg 2003, 103-123, reprises that perspective on the commonality of Christianity and other enduring religions in life transformation through spiritual death and rebirth in Chapter Six, "Born Again: A New Heart." And, 215-219, in the section "Are All Religions Thus the Same?" Borg discusses the commonalities and differences of the major enduring religions in terms of the internal core and the external form of each, noting that while the enduring religions have major core

commonalities, as discussed above, they have obvious differences in their external forms. Then he takes the old trope of different paths to the same destination—heaven or the afterlife—and adapts it with the image, borrowed from Seyyed Hossein Nasr who credits Pallis 1991, of a steep mountain with a variety of paths to the peak which rather than representing heaven or the afterlife represents the experience and knowledge of the sacred in this present life. And he notes that the problem of exclusivism and the tensions between the different religions arise when adherents absolutize the externals of their respective ways rather than recognizing that those external forms are sacraments or mediators or paths toward the goal common to all: the experience of the sacred. Then Borg 2003, 220-222, in a section headed “Why Be Christian,” lists a number of logical reasons and practical paths for rejecting Christian exclusivism and embracing the validity of other religions as ways of being in relation with “the sacred,” “the more,” “the ultimate,” “the source,” and “the being” of all that is, including (1) taking pluralism seriously as a feature of the world as it is, (2) knowing about other religions and especially knowing people of those religions, (3) common sense: “Does it make sense that ‘the more’ whom we speak of as creator of the whole universe has chosen to be known in only one tradition, which just fortunately happens to be our own?” (4) the classic Christian emphasis on grace—salvation is not based on requirements, whether beliefs or practices, (5) “...seeing the similarity between Christianity and other religions adds to the credibility of Christianity rather than threatening it,” (6) a perspective on the two most frequently cited texts in the case for Christianity as “the only way,” John 14:6 and Acts 4:12, that understands them as both truth and devotion. Truth in that Jesus is the Christian version of the way of spiritual death followed by a new way of being spiritually alive, the way that is also at the heart of other enduring religions, and devotion in the poetic sense of the thankful enthusiasm of a lover who has found his or her soul mate or life partner, “You’re the only one for me,” or even

“you’re the most beautiful person in the world.” Borg 2003, 222, concludes this line of thought: “To echo Krister Stendahl..., we can sing our love songs to Jesus with wild abandon without needing to demean other religions.”

[¶5] There is an ongoing canonical process in interpretation, generational transmission, teaching and preaching of resignifying, repurposing, and recontextualizing religious texts in relation to new occasions.

James Sanders 1984, 66-67, describes how John 14:6 can be interpreted in a non-exclusivist way by continuing in our time and situation the canonical process and canonical hermeneutics of resignifying and repurposing ancient scripture texts in relation to the situation and needs of our believing communities that live and move in our present day world and in relation to the message and values of the immediate larger context of the passage at hand and the Bible (canon) as a whole. More specifically with reference to the familiar exclusivist interpretations of John 14:6 (my Jesus the only way) and some Old Testament texts (political Zionism) Sanders writes of replacing a denominational or tribal hermeneutic with a prophetic hermeneutic, such as exemplified in his n. 10: “The prophet Ezekiel (33:23-29) utterly rejects, in his day, 586 B.C.E., an interpretation or application of a divine promise to Abraham which nearly fifty years later, 540 B.C.E., Isaiah of the exile advances as gospel (Isa. 51:1-3).” Another example, this one in 20th century homiletic theology, of the ongoing process of canonical hermeneutics resignifying, repurposing and recontextualizing texts for new situations in a changing cultural milieu can be seen in Mitchell 1990, 131, where he discusses the necessity for Black preachers to make fresh renditions and applications of texts long familiar and favored in the Black churches, for example, “the vivid imagery of the eagle stirring her nest (Deut. 32:11)—knowing when to push the eaglets out to fly on their own—with regard to the ever-changing but ever-present “growing-up problems

in the ghetto family.” But getting back to Borg’s discussion around the major commonality of a spiritual inner death to an existing way of being and living in this world and a spiritual inner rebirth (or resurrection) into a new way of being and living in this world: that perspective on Christianity and other enduring religions, it seems to me, adds a bold venture of specificity and commitment to the modest and diplomatic, if somewhat tentative, proposal of Diogenes Allen 1989, 17, spelled out fully, 185-196, in Chapter Ten: “A Christian Theology of Other Faiths.” Allen affirms that we need to understand other religions from the inside out and develop a Christian perspective on how, say, another religion fits into the economy of God as Christians understand God’s nature and activities, a perspective that recognizes the fact that we do not yet fully know what God has in mind for the peoples of other faiths, just as Paul acknowledged a kernel of truth in the shrine to an unknown god in Athens, Acts 17:23, but also acknowledges that he did not fully understand what God had in mind for those people of Israel who did not receive Jesus as the Messiah, Romans, Chapters 9-11.

[¶6] **Seeing the Bible as a human product leads to a consideration of the nature of history writing generally and of the writing of biblical history in particular.**

Seeing the Bible as a human product, that is, a book of human origin that was written by people of faith who were inspired by the movement of the Spirit in their lives, as Borg 2003, 46, cited above, articulates, can be considered in the context of the nature of history writing in general and the writing of biblical history in particular. Collingwood 1993 states that history writing, i.e., historiography, always involves the historian in inferring from his or her sources what must have happened in the past and then attempting to reenact those events in one’s own mind. Of course, the history writer’s inference as to what must have happened will always be influenced in some

measure by their own cultural, historical and personal mindset. And, according to G. Ernest Wright 1952, the writers of biblical history were necessarily engaged in a second level of inference based on their faith in the sovereign creating and providential God. That is, they inferred from what must have happened and from their faith-based knowledge of God's purposes, intentions, and actions in the beginning and from all eternity what must have been God's intentions and actions in the subsequent events about which they were writing. Treating the whole Bible as simply a supernatural oracle is exactly what Scholes 1974, 130, citing E. D. Hirsch, calls a "generic misunderstanding" or misreading of a literary text, that is, treating a text as being of a genre that it is not. James Sanders 1984, *xvi-xvii*, suggests that what makes the Bible the sacred canon for Christian faith communities today is the belief that the Holy Spirit of God was at work in the original speaking and writing of these words, and in the transmission and editing (redacting) of these words, and in the believing communities and human councils by which these writings were included in the sacred canon, and is still at work in the faithful teaching and preaching of God's Word from the words of the Bible and in the listening minds and hearts of those who hear that faithful teaching and preaching in faith communities, and in the seeing minds and believing hearts of those who read the words of Scripture in faith and devotion. Wherever in faith communities the Holy Spirit of God is seen to be at work in all of these levels and stages of God's written Word, there in those believing fellowships the Bible is sacred Scripture, authoritative Scripture, and canonical Scripture. I have discussed Paul Ricoeur's view of sacred and authoritative in Chapter I [¶ 10]. Wilson 2007, 57-58, in the introductory paragraphs of his Section II on "Connecting the Bible and Today" clearly embraces the postmodern hermeneutics of canonical criticism—respecting the faith witness of the believing community behind a text—while diminishing the homiletic significance of a narrowly facticity-focused historical criticism

such as seen in the findings of the Jesus Seminar which represents a third wave in the quest for the historical Jesus. I have identified the three waves or three quests in Chapter I [¶ 8]. But wherever the Bible is taken to be somehow a sacred text apart from the work of the Holy Spirit at all of these stages, then the Bible is treated as a magical oracle; it becomes an idol; it cannot be properly subjected to historical and literary analysis by scientific methods; and those who so take the Bible are adherents and practitioners of biblicism or bibliolatry. God's incarnational choice means that the Bible, like any other work of human speaking and writing is such that persons of good faith and good will may differ on the provenance and meaning and application of any passage and that neither may be certain that he or she is right and the other is wrong, far less that the other is guilty of intentional misconstrual or abuse. God's incarnational choice in producing the Hebrew Scriptures which are the source of the Old Testament is reflected in Alter 1981, 12, where he notes that a literary approach in understanding the religious or theological intent for faith in the stories of the Hebrew Bible is justified and even required because God's experiment with Israel and history is dependent on the acts of individual people for the continuing realization of that experiment (also referenced in Chapter I [¶ 14]). I understand that when I refer to God's incarnational choice in allowing the written witness to God's self-revealing activity and intentions in history to be a human creation subject to all the contingencies, conflicts, fallibilities, and temporalities of human culture, and when Robert Alter writes of God's experiment with Israel not being finished, Alter and I are both speaking of God in confessional, i.e., "faith-based," and anthropomorphic terms, he of the Jewish faith and I of the Christian faith.

[¶7] **There is a delicate theological balance required in discerning and describing God's purposes, intentions, and actions in history and in present events without ascribing to God the role of a heavenly puppeteer or micromanager.**

Borg 2003, 45-46 avoids anthropomorphic language about God's actions and intentions, yet is also writing from a confessional or "faith-based" perspective when he states that the Bible is a human product, written by people who sensed the movement of God's Spirit in their lives and in their world, and, 47-60, when he sees the Bible as having acquired sacred status and function among people of faith through the historical process of canonization. According to Borg, 59-60, viewing the Bible as human in origin and sacred in status and function leads to a view of the Christian life which is less about believing or subscribing to certain teachings or doctrines and more about living faithfully in a relationship that is informed, mediated, and nurtured through the historical witness of the Bible and the light of the divine Spirit in the community of faithful people. Seeking to understand the religious or theological intent of a scripture passage rather than using the material world view implicit in the passage to argue with some article of a modern scientific perspective is surely a good way to avoid biblicist thinking or bibliolatry. As Haddon Robinson 2001, 82, has written, "We do well...to adopt the attitude that a statement is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true," which of course leaves open the question of how it is true, that is, what kind of truth it is. Surely Robinson must mean something along the lines that statements in the Bible are faith-based or theological truths, divinely revealed truths about the knowledge of God in people of faith. Borg 2003, 49-56, in a section headed "The Truth of Metaphor" has a more literary take on the kinds of truth that are in the Bible, including, 51, a pithy statement in a sermon by a Catholic priest, "The Bible is true, and some of it happened," and the customary proviso used by Native Americans in relating their tribe's story of creation: "Now I don't know if it happened this way or not, but I know this story is true" (also cited below [¶ 30] and Chapter III [¶ 5]). Further, Borg, 92 and in n. 12, explains how, in his view, it is possible to interpret destructive and even tragic historical events retrospectively in

terms of divine providence, that is, God producing good out of evil events, yet not imputing to God the device of causing evil events so that God could demonstrate producing good out of evil events. Borg uses the example of Joseph's providential interpretation of his own history with his treacherous brothers in Genesis 45 to make his theological point. Alter 1981, 63-113, expounds on how the biblical writers use narration, dialogue, and repetition to show the interplay between human motivations and events and the inexorable purposes of God in history.

[¶8] There are complex resources of faith and historical perspectives available for defending against the ever-present hazard of bibliolatry/biblicism.

Historical critical study of the Bible is a good beginning toward avoiding biblicism, but something more is needed for faithful preaching and teaching. Ritschl 1963, 145-146, points out that even though proclamation in preaching or teaching is behind every passage in the Bible, i.e., every passage of scripture *is* a sermon or a lesson, to simply focus on identifying each source sermon in the Bible and its occasion would lead to relativizing the historical mighty acts of God and absolutizing the Bible's witness to them, which is surely a kind of biblicism. Just so, the new fashioned biblicism that Buttrick exposes is where preachers get so occupied in historical-critical exegesis of scripture texts that they fail to address the present issues of God-with-us-in-a-being-saved-world, i.e., issues of social justice. Lowry 1992, 86, writes of "textual idolatry" in a similar vein. The above cited recommendation of textual study as a hedge against biblicism is clearly not sufficient in the case of the newfangled kind of biblicism identified by Buttrick, triggered as it is by a narrow and distorting focus on technical exegesis. Bultmann 1958, 55, asserts that historical and exegetical study should not be practiced without reflection on the philosophical stance and conceptions which guide the exegesis, since every exegetical or hermeneutic approach in history

is based on some philosophical framework which, ordinarily, is a cultural inheritance of the exegete. In addition to whatever philosophical conceptions may have shaped the thinking and expression of the interpreter, the person of faith approaches the task of historical criticism as one who believes in the living God. This dual perspective, a culturally inherited philosophical and scientific perspective and a theological perspective, is succinctly described by Long 2005, 57-58, in two sentences: “Because the Bible is in human language, and the texts of the Bible were written both for and in social situations, everything about the Bible is culturally conditioned. Because the ultimate referent of biblical texts is God, everything about the Bible is infused with gospel.” I also cite these two statements in Chapter I [¶ 14, ¶ 15] and in Chapter IV [¶ 53]. Long 2005, 57, discusses how to read and interpret the scriptural texts so as to hear the gospel as a kind of force at work in a biblical text cutting across two kinds of cultural static, that of the text’s own cultural world and that of our own cultural world, and he cites J. Christian Beker on a “catalytic reading of Scripture,” a more sanguine idea, it seems to me, than Bultmann’s demythologization. A catalytic reading resists both literalist transfer of outdated material worldviews and cultural values and the imposition of modernist prejudices in discerning the authoritative claims of a text upon people of faith and their faith communities; think: “treasure in clay jars,” 2 Cor. 4:7 (also cited in Chapter I [¶15]. I discuss further along [¶ 26] Allen and Springsted’s philosophical perspective on Bultmann’s project of demythologizing the Bible, which I also mentioned in Chapter I [¶ 15]).

[¶9] **The interactive context of scriptural interpretation and gospel proclamation includes psychological experience, objective analysis, religious community development and resistance to the many tendencies toward bibliolatry/biblicism.**

The suggestion by Buttrick that the kind of biblicism that avoids addressing the gospel to the

present age by focusing narrowly on scriptural exegesis is *caused* by systematically preaching from a course of assigned texts, whether continuous or by a liturgical calendar, is a direct reversal of P. T. Forsythe's assertion that systematic exposition can be a corrective to the biblicism of an atomistic approach, treating the Bible as a "scrapbook" from which clippings may be selected based on a preacher's personal predilections, as cited in Stott 1982, 316. In a similar vein, von Allmen 1962, 38-39, notes that preaching from assigned lectionary texts can serve to prevent or at least reduce the thematic monotony that is inevitable when preachers freely select texts according to their own predilections and current interests and concerns. Occasionally someone will venture the suggestion that preaching from a schedule of assigned texts constrains the work of the Holy Spirit in selecting appropriate texts for particular times and circumstances, implying that the Spirit can only work through the extemporaneous perceptions and intuitions of a freewheeling pious preacher, forgetting that the Spirit blows where and when the Spirit chooses. Yet, on the other hand, if a preacher uses his or her laser-like focus on scripture exposition to address current issues in church and world with prophetic force, he or she is very likely to be accused of biblicism. Old (Volume 3) 1999, 602-603, mentions the charge of biblicism often leveled against the fiery pre-Reformation Catholic preacher and martyr, Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498). According to Fant and Pinson 1995, I, 263-264, Savonarola used his scriptural exposition to attack ecclesiastical corruption, political corruption, and the corruption of public morals. That's why he was accused of biblicism by people of power and influence. And Old (Volume 6) 2007, 51, notes that efforts in the 19th century to counterbalance the psychologizing, socializing, moralizing, and spiritualizing of scriptural accounts with traditional expository teaching and preaching were inevitably labeled as biblicism, "but," wrote Old, "something much more profound is going on." Bultmann 1958, 70-71, takes Barth's Word of God theology as a revolt against the supposed psychologizing of the

Christian faith by such as Schleiermacher and Feuerbach. Tillich 1951, 41-42, indicates that the often-repeated charge of psychologizing against Schleiermacher is based on a misreading of Schleiermacher's use of the words feel and feeling in his famous statement that the essence of Christian faith is a feeling of complete dependence on God. And Bultmann defends his own program of demythologization against the charge of psychologizing by noting that one does not generate encounter with God in a demythologized gospel out of one's own mental or philosophical framework or one's experiential approach or one's hermeneutical preferences but rather such encounter with God must come to one by the grace of faith given as one is encountered by God's Word and Spirit. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 121-122, suggests that Bultmann himself uses mythological language and thinking in his discussion of encounter with God. I suppose that postmodernist philosophy could, like Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, and Bultmann, be accused of psychologizing because of its openness to human experience beyond the observation and analysis of empirical data, but so what! Are there any human beings, believing or skeptical, in that hypothetical world where psychological experience does not exist? Or can God meet a person in God's Word and Spirit apart from that person's psyche (= soul or mind)? Or can a person's encounter with God via God's Word and Spirit be observed and analyzed objectively or empirically? No, no, and no. So, three cheers for subjectivity and for psychologizing our experience of God! On the other hand, Lischer 2001, 76-92, discusses the preaching event as a turn to the subject, that is, preaching that aims to persuade or encourage individual persons, and he proposes a return to the New Testament model of preaching as part of a process of forming a faith community by the proclamation of the gospel and the communal performance of the gospel in the sermon and in all of the church's actions of worship, fellowship, study, and its outreaching service and witness in the world. I say more about Lischer's vision of preaching as the church's

language in a communal activity in a continual process of self-formation further along in this section and in other sections.

[¶10] **Contrary to Buttrick 1994 and Farley 1997: misinterpreting texts and missing the mark of addressing the gospel to the most urgent issues and problems in the present moment are neither caused nor hindered by preaching from systematic courses of scripture, nor by interpretive bridging from the ancient context of text and gospel to the present context of the preaching.**

If it really is the lectionaries and a renewed emphasis on scripture exposition that have precipitated a new biblicism in preaching, which I seriously doubt, then a lectionary such as *The Open Bible Lectionary* (Book II of this volume) which makes a big thing of appointing every passage in all four gospels and opens a way for expository series on the rest of the New Testament and all of the Old Testament, might tend to help solidify this form of captivity rather than help break the chains. On the other hand, if we would avoid the trap of biblicism by gladly receiving the Bible as a gracious gift from God, as Buttrick 1987, 248-249, has suggested, should we not be eager to open this gift by opening ourselves up to any and all passages in the Bible? I think we should. Are we really open to presenting any passage of scripture for reading and exposition in Sunday worship if we do not deliberately schedule for such? Are the scholarly commentators purveying a stubborn, literalist, idolatrous biblicism because they treat of every passage in a book of the Bible? I do not think so. West 1997, 54-57, surveys a symposium conducted by *The Expository Times* from 1905 to 1907 among Presbyterian ministers in Scotland on various ideas and approaches for reading and preaching systematically from the entire Bible. According to West, the various proposals and practices reported in the symposium reflect “a continuum between those who would search the Bible for passages reflecting the themes they understand to be central and those who would submit to the authority conveyed by the Bible’s

literary form(s).” Was the whole idea of the symposium an expression of bibliolatry? I do not think so. Farley 1996, 172-175, especially n. 2, p. 175, sees the danger of biblicism in preaching from assigned pericopes in a lectionary, whether a calendar lectionary or a continuous series on a book of the Bible, because these pericope systems are based on a faulty “fundamentalist” assumption that each and every slice of canonical scripture, no matter how you cut it, contains a holy truth from which one may preach. (I discuss other critiques of the “snippet principle” in the pericope systems in Book II, n.10.) But Farley seems to assume that lectionary preachers are taking the day’s principal lection out of its whole Bible context and drawing a magical word from God out of it to apply to the life of the hearers, the church, and the world by way of what he calls the bridge paradigm. Such a hermeneutic practice may be in use by some preachers that follow a lectionary; but should not that approach to scripture interpretation be faulted rather than faulting the bridge paradigm or the pericope system? James Stewart (1896-1990) was surely not prone to taking scripture passages out of their biblical context, but he clearly affirmed the necessity of the bridging, for he wrote, as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 188:

The Gospel is not for an age, but for all time: yet it is precisely the particular age – this historic hour and none other – to which we are commissioned by God to speak. It is against the background of the contemporary situation that we have to reinterpret the Gospel once for all delivered to the saints; and it is within the framework of current hopes and fears that we have to show the commanding revelation of Jesus.

Lowry 1997, 29-31, discusses three categories of preaching, adapted in part from Lucy Rose, *traditional*, *kerygmatic*, and *transformational*, and how they differ as to whether preaching requires bridging or translation from the biblical message to the world of present experience or simply an announcement of that message, or some kind of reimagining.

[¶11] The world of the gospel (per Farley 1996) is a moveable (in time and geo-cultural context) symbolic world that sometimes needs translation

or reimagining or simply recasting in contemporary everyday language.

Even though the Buttrick/Farley critique of lectionary based preaching as abusing the scheduled texts in a tunnel vision approach to exposition is applied too generally and thus unfairly, Farley's proposal of an alternative to the bridge paradigm can be very helpful, where he suggests the kind of broad study and experience that are necessary for preaching "the world of the gospel" with integrity. N.B., he did not write *word* of the gospel but *world* of the gospel. The construction world-of-the-gospel, along with Buttrick's God-with-us-in-a-being-saved-world, may become clearer to one who considers the discussion of "The Making of Symbolic Worlds" in Johnson 1999, 11-14, and Johnson's usage, 21-22, "The Symbolic World of the New Testament," and, 65, "world of Torah," and, 23-41 and passim, "Greco-Roman Symbolic World." Greco-Roman suggests a particular span of history in a particular geographic region, but symbolic worlds are generally moveable, not fixed in time and place; and one time and place can contain or produce more than one symbolic world. For example, Johnson 1999, 526, observes that the Fourth Gospel reflects a different symbolic world from that of the synoptics, but he indicates that does not require that the Gospel according to John must have been written outside of Palestine or at a much later date than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It may be true, as in Farley 1996, 172-175, that preaching the world-of-the-gospel as universally applicable in the world of today and in the world of the ancient text can relieve sermons of being dominated and weighed down by the work of bridging from the world of there-and-then to the world of here-and-now, the bridge paradigm being based as it is on filling the preaching atmosphere with observations and discoveries from the historical critical study of the text and the ancient world of the text, it certainly cannot relieve the preacher of the responsibility of doing the kind of study on which the bridge paradigm is based, because reading the age-defying world of the gospel in the text requires that kind of study.

G. Ernest Wright 1952, 108, acknowledges that there really is a problem and a challenge of getting from the Bible's mode of recital and narrative of God's acts in history to the articulation of an intelligible faith in the modern church and the modern world—which is more Hellenic than Hebraic in its ways of thinking. And he indicates that it is a task for Christian philosophy and systematic theology (and, therefore, preachers) to analyze and interpret the faith in its many aspects and to make its relevance to modern people apparent—N.B., not make the faith relevant but make its relevance apparent. And Wright asserts: “Theology may perhaps be defined as the discipline by which the Church, carefully and with full knowledge of the risk, translates Biblical faith into the non-Biblical language of another age. It is an extension of the Bible into the non-Biblical world.” Thus the philosopher-theologian-preacher must do the work of bridging in the sermon preparation workshop if not in the pulpit (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 28]). The following statement of Johnson 1999, 457, as to his purpose in writing a brief historical overview of *The Letter to the Hebrews* is instructive: “I want only to provide a framework that might help connect Hebrews with its ancient symbolic context, illuminating—at the very least—the way the letter ought to be read.” I take this to mean that when it comes to sermon preparation the preacher must study the ancient symbolic context of a text in order to responsibly read the symbolic world of the gospel in that text and announce its universal relevance in the here and now. Long 2004, 10-11, shows how symbolic worlds are evoked in everyday experience, as when a parent uses words with a worried child to evoke a symbolic but very real and material world of comfort, security, and self-worth; and how “to speak truthfully about God is also to enter a world, a world in which God is present and can be trusted. To speak about God is to live in a world and to speak out of it.” Ronald Allen 1998, 208-217, in a discussion of how stories, images, and experiences can function in a sermon, has a section, 210-212, headed “The Worlds Created, Evoked, and Authorized by

Stories, Images, and Experiences” (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 59]).

[¶12] **The gospel of forgiveness freely given along with promise costly to receive, may sometimes have its own power to bridge the gap between the world of the text and the world of here and now, and may be preached from a text of scripture or preached from a life situation in the light of the scriptures. Receiving such proclamation of grace and promise leads to a new or renewed life in relationship with God, God’s community, and all of God’s creation.**

Lischer 2001, 9, observes that preaching from the here and now situation in light of Scripture and the coherent center of the gospel of grace and promise is not entirely different from preaching from a Scripture text in relation to a present situation and the coherent center of the gospel of grace and promise and vice versa (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 87]). I take Lischer’s construction “gospel of grace and promise” as a reminder that the gospel of Christ is not simply a word of “cheap grace” as in “all-is-forgiven; God-is-in-his-heaven-and-all-is-right-with-the-world.” Rather, the gospel of Christ is a word of genuine forgiveness that is accompanied by hope and promise of what the world *can* be in God’s purpose. I acknowledge the fact that Bonhoeffer’s 1948, 37-38 [German 1937], coining of the term cheap grace was focused mainly on the matter of individual discipleship. Someone has paraphrased the meaning of cheap grace for individual discipleship something like this (I paraphrase and elaborate the paraphrase as I remember it): If you want God’s grace to deal with your sin but not with you the sinner, you cheapen the gift; that is, if you want God to deal with your past but do not change your intentions in your present and for your future, you are asking for cheap grace. Bonhoeffer 1948, 41-49, makes the case that Luther’s recovery of the teaching of justification by grace through faith alone meant costly grace to Luther but was soon transmuted by some “Lutherans” and other interpreters into grace without discipleship. Another description of free but costly grace applied more broadly to the hope and

promise of God's purposes for the world is seen in Ronald Allen's 1998, xi-xii, statement, citing his own earlier work with Clark Williamson 1991 and other works of Williamson, "I take the gospel to be the news, revealed to the church through Jesus Christ, of God's unconditional love for each and every created entity and God's will for justice for each and every created entity." As to the power of the gospel of grace and promise in bridging the gulf between the world of the Bible and the world of today, Lischer 2001, 9, wrote "When the preacher projects all history and experience through the eternal prism, the infinite relevance of the gospel itself bridges the distance between the then-and-there and the here-and-now." Further, Lischer, 68, in a chapter headed "Christian Anthropology" (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 15]) and a section called 'The Concupiscence of Preaching' discusses the contemporary preacher's dilemma as a "*carrier* of modern unbelief in the sense of one who is immune to the disease which is carried," that is, the preacher being a creature of and participant in the cultural and cosmological world view of modern and postmodern times, being called from a life of faith and fellowship "in the shadows of a skeptical age" (including the quiescent, insular, non-confrontational, active hands-on humanitarian mission focus of many Christian congregations) "to step into the light in order to proclaim a message toward which the speaker harbors deep and perhaps unconscious ambivalence." Lischer 2001, 70-73, in the section "What Makes Preaching Possible," addresses this seemingly untenable position of the preacher and the people in terms of the meaning of creation in the Image of God as humankind's answerability in a responsive relationship between God and humanity. And then, 73-75, in the section "Who Is Sufficient For These Things?" he lists "the resources available to every Christian Man or Woman" to help us in the daunting task of preaching the gospel in all of our walk and conversation as God's covenant people: "baptism, the community of the past, the brothers and sisters of today's church, the Scriptures, prayer, and the

Holy Spirit.” Borg 2003, 33-34, has a similar list of resources—worship, prayer, practice and a life of compassion and justice—available to Christians for help in the practice of faith as *fidelitas*—faithfulness: paying attention to and tending our life of faith as a faithful relationship with God and God’s people and God’s world. Further, Borg, 119-121, mentions the importance of such corporate and individual practices as mentioned above under the heading of intentionality or spirituality as attentiveness to our relationship with God as people who have experienced new birth in Jesus Christ. Preachers and people can be helped in using those resources as means of grace to revitalize their relationship with God by keeping in mind a paragraph in Helmut Thielicke’s sermon “The Meaning of Prayer:”

But whoever has decided to pray (really to *pray*), must seize the *hand* of God, not the *pennies* in his hand. Whoever is only after the pennies will regard the hand as immaterial after he has received the tribute. For to this kind of person, the hand is only a means to an end—one that can provide his spending money, or carry him through a crisis. And after that he shoves the hand away. Then it is not necessary any more; it has fulfilled its obligation and it can withdraw. (in Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 233)

[¶13] **Preaching can be seen as the work of the whole church in continuously forming and reforming itself as a community of contrast to the ways of the world while making faithful use of the resources provided by God: prayer, scripture, Christian history/theological tradition, worship/fellowship, and public witness in speech and action.**

The reference to the spiritual resources, practices and disciplines that can fit ministers and the whole church for the work of preaching leads into the bigger picture that Lischer 2001 presents in the final chapter, VI. PREACHING AS THE CHURCH’S LANGUAGE, 76-92. There he discusses how the treatment of preaching as event during recent centuries and the turn to the subject, that is, targeting the persuasion and edification of individual persons, and thus to preaching as translation (compare ‘bridge paradigm’ in Farley 1996) of the language of the scriptural word into the language of the present world, often by way of illustrations selected to

show similarities and parallels between the Word and the world, and by way of the creation of endless abstract worlds (compare ‘symbolic worlds’ in Johnson 1999 and ‘world of the gospel’ in Farley 1996). And he suggests that the time has come for a turn to the church such that the church is seen as continuously forming and sustaining itself according to God’s Word and Spirit as a community of contrast with the ways of the world, which is integral to the church’s witness and invitation to the world. Similarly, Massey 1980, 28, writes under the heading of “The Shaping of Community Through Preaching,” that part of the function of the church’s preaching is “to elicit faith and sustain a people during their procession and mission.” And Lischer 2001, 88-89, indicates that the church’s language for the church’s work of continually forming and reforming itself as a faith community is the language of narrative, not telling illustrative stories from contemporary life but telling and performing God’s Story, *The Story*, the church’s story, the story of the church’s proclamation through sermons and through everything else that the church is and does. Mitchell 1990, 19-22, notes that while Black preaching may access the key insights of postmodern hermeneutics, that preaching tradition must also access and use—and may share with the larger world of preaching—the important values and contributions of a Black preaching and teaching hermeneutic which has been developed over many decades of separation from full access to the White European hermeneutic and homiletic tradition. That Black hermeneutic has ways of integrating the telling of God’s Story and the telling of the Black story. Further, Mitchell 1990, 56-75, has sections in his Chapter 4, “The Black Approach to the Bible” that can be helpful in learning how to tell God’s Story—*The Story*—as our narrative rather than tell our stories as illustrative parallels to God’s Story: ‘The Bible as Oral Tradition,’ ‘Gospel, Not Science,’ ‘Creative Use of Scholarship,’ ‘Imaginative Elaboration,’ ‘Identification: The Bible as My Story,’ ‘Storytelling,’ ‘The Universal Bible’ (This chapter also cited in Chapter IV

[¶ 7]). Thus, it seems that whether the contemporary preacher resorts, on the one hand, to some form of the bridge paradigm or, on the other hand, intends to proclaim the age-defying symbolic world-of-the-gospel, he or she must confront his or her inherited split personality—creature of the modern/postmodern age and child of a community of faith—and embrace the self-transcendence that has been given in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in the church. As Lischer 2001, 68, wrote “This ‘I yet not I’ (Galatians 2:20 KJV)... is joined to the Christ in repentance and hope and in him finds that integration which makes speech about God possible.” Thus, as mentioned above, Lischer concludes the chapter on “Christian Anthropology” in a section headed ‘Who is Sufficient to These Things,’ 73-75, in order to be faithful in proclaiming the world of the gospel (Lischer does not use Farley’s expression world-of-the-gospel) as being alive and active in the modern/postmodern world as well as in the world of the Bible, preachers are reminded to do what we and our congregants in some communions promised to do in our baptismal or confirmation services: make diligent use of the “means of grace,” (a theologically fraught concept; “spiritual disciplines and opportunities of service” might be better), but we were taught that the “means” were scripture study, prayer, worship (sacraments, preaching, prayer and praise in common), informal Christian fellowship, opportunities of witness and service, etc. While Lischer does not use the expression means of grace he writes “we need to utilize the resources available to every Christian man and woman.” And he describes these resources with special reference to their function in the lives of preachers and their work of sermon preparation, under the headings of *Baptism*, *The Community of the Past*, *The Brothers and Sisters*, *The Scriptures*, *Prayer*, and *The Holy Spirit*. I have references in Book II, n. 8 [¶ 2] to Barth and Bonhoeffer on the importance for preachers of daily devotional scripture reading and Bible study other than in sermon preparation.

[¶14] **There are commonalities and differences between sociological perspectives on religious life in general and a theological perspective on the sociology of the church. Also, the shape of a theological or faith-based hermeneutic for the interpretation of biblical texts in the church's proclamation has gone through many changes in Christian history.**

The symbolic worlds of biblical faith as spoken and lived in Judaism and Christianity have many correspondences with the description of the sociological characteristics of religion articulated by Emile Durkheim (as referenced in Langer 1993, 164-166), except that all the material symbols in the Jewish and Christian faiths—Torah scrolls, perpetual flame, bread, creeds, lamb bone, pulpit, Bible, altar/table, phylacteries, cross, water, baptistry, font—are intended to point to and bind a communal and individual relationship with the living, creating, transcendent, imminent, self-revealing, hiding, just, judging, holy, self-giving, redeeming, and sustaining God and not the god which is actually the society or tribal culture that has invested some creature or a creature's image with supernatural power, as in totemism, the study of which is the basis of Durkheim's descriptions of and conclusions about religion in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (English Translation; Langer's references are to the French original *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*). A contrast to the mainly sociological take on religious communities seen in Durkheim, Weber, and Troeltsch can be seen in Bonhoeffer 1963, especially 180, a more intentionally theological take on the sociology of the church, where the empirical church as the *sanctorum communio* is distinguished from all other religious communities by describing the church as a community of spirit, thus affirming the transcendental foundation of the church, a community established by God's giving of himself to humans in love through Jesus Christ and in establishing a community of spirit which is enlivened, guided, and strengthened for the doing of God's will of love towards the whole world and towards one another by the loving presence and

action of the Holy Spirit in the community of spirit and, thereby, in each of its members. So, how will the church as the *communion of saints* deal with the texts of scripture as it talks to itself and to the world, that is, in its teaching and preaching? I make reference to structural semiotics, citing Ricoeur and Scholes, below [¶ 45]. Ricoeur 1975, 34, defines hermeneutics as the task of displaying the kind of “world” projected by a certain kind of text, also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 31]. Similar usage of the constructions world-of-the-text and gospel-shaped-world is made in Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 8-10 and 18-19. The latter pages contain a citation of Karen Jo Torjesen 1986 on the early church theologian Origen’s teaching and preaching: his exegetical and homiletical program in which he sees the living Word, Christ, in every text, including Old Testament, and locates the hearers in the text as believers in Christ who meet him afresh in his teaching through Scripture. Jenson 1982 traces some of the changes in church hermeneutics and homiletics through the formulations of Nicaea and Chalcedon and the interpretations of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin with positive and negative consequences for approaches to the proclamation of law and gospel through Jesus in every text of the Bible without the aid of fantastical allegory or universally applied typology. Wilson 2007, 219-220, discusses ‘The Cross and the Old Testament’ in his chapter on “Composing to Persuade,” and he asserts, 219 shaded area, “Denying a christological center to the Old Testament one may still affirm a christological center to preaching” (also cited in Book II, n. 4). And, 247-262, he provides specific guidance for composing the sermon with a gospel hermeneutic, that is, reading the text through the lens of the cross and the resurrection (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 53], and in Book II, n. 4 [¶ 2] in reference to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust). A strictly Christocentric hermeneutic, which is seen by many contemporary scholars as fraught with dangers of distortion, is still favored by Keller 2015, 15-90, where he makes a strong case for preaching the Christ gospel from every text

in Old and New Testaments. Keller sees a christocentric hermeneutic as the only sure way to always preach the good news of God's love and grace rather than slip into preaching messages of moralistic religion or works righteousness. And, of course, he also notes some of the hazards if one carelessly imposes Jesus on every text rather than studying to discern how the text truly functions in the Bible's good news saga. Ritschl 1963, 47-56, discusses "The Worldliness of the Word." I take it that the concept "world-of-the-gospel," unlike "world-of-the-text," is intended to span the ages and is thus not bound to the time-limited symbolic world in which the ancient text came into existence.

[¶15] **The necessary preparatory groundwork for preaching/teaching the always relevant world-of-the-gospel from scripture texts necessarily involves the interpreter in some measure of the bridge work of recontextualizing. It also involves him or her in the subject-object hermeneutic circle.**

The discernment and articulation of the age-defying world of the gospel by the preacher, teacher, study group, or any other interpreter necessarily requires a dynamic and interactive interpretation process that has been variously characterized as the bridge paradigm (Farley), deep structure of trouble and grace (Wilson), flying trapeze release and catch back and forth (Gross via Wilson), ferrying back and forth between the ancient world and the modern world (Thielicke), linguistic analysis (Massey), the fusion of horizons (Gadamer via Allen & Springsted), historical/critical exegesis followed by theological exegesis and a gospel hermeneutic (Wilson), a catalytic reading (Beker via Long), liturgical/homiletic linkage of Scriptural text to the gospel in life and to the eucharistic action (Fuller), a historical/metaphorical/sacramental reading (Borg), monotheizing/resignifying/repurposing (James Sanders), demything (Bultmann), all of which unavoidably participate in the inevitable hermeneutic circle (objective-subjective 'round and

‘round, i.e., text affects interpreter, interpreter affects text). Wilson 2007, 83, develops the notion of a hermeneutic circling or spiraling back and forth between the world of a text and the world of an interpreter into quadrants of a circle designated: “what the text says,” “what the text means,” “what experience says,” and “what the preacher says.” And, 131, when it comes to what the preacher says in the body of the sermon, he notes that it is important to have a fair balance between the amount of time spent talking about the world of the text and the time spent talking about the world of here and now “so that the Bible and our world are each given adequate attention.” And Wilson, 267-272, demonstrates his own work in such syntactical bridging or contextualizing balance in his sermon “Degrees of Glory” expounding 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, preached to ministers in a continuing education conference. Whatever bridging processes and tools we preachers may use in our scriptural, theological, and experience studies in our work of discerning the age-defying world-of-the-gospel in a text during sermon preparation in order to leave those processes and tools behind when we preach the world-of-the-gospel, we should not forget that the hearers will need a bridging process and some bridging tools in their own studies of scripture, theology, and experience. Further along, I discuss how Borg’s 2001, 2003 historical-metaphorical-sacramental hermeneutic can help preachers to break out of the pattern of diplomatically obfuscating the critical study process by which they arrive at their moments of homiletic discovery during sermon preparation, thus missing opportunities to help people develop an approach to Bible study and interpretation that is commensurate with their modern/postmodern cultural environment and worldview. Craddock 2011, 9-17, has a discussion of “New Testament Theology as a Pastoral Task” which I see as an outline of the historical foundations of the bridge paradigm in the Reformation and in the advent of the historical critical study of the Bible.

[¶16] The interpreter who would bridge the gap between the ancient cosmological and cultural worldviews reflected in a biblical text and contemporary worldviews can be helped by understanding other ways that the word gap has been used in science, philosophy and theology.

The essential feature of the bridge paradigm in preaching is the practice of beginning with an acknowledgement of the gap between the ancient cultures and prescientific cosmologies reflected in the biblical literature and the modern culture and scientific cosmology of our own times. Bultmann 1955 [VOL. II] 237-238, *Epilogue*, explains that since it is impossible for scripture texts to know or fit into the political and technological environments of later generations, theological statements are always a work of translation or unpacking or transposing or interpretation in progress and can never be finalized or made intelligible or applicable for all time to come. And while Bultmann himself is noted for unpacking the “mythological” terms of the New Testament, for example an antiquated or prescientific cosmology, in order to get at the theological thought or the faith experience of a believing community carried in these clay jars, he observes that the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Luther, and gospel preachers generally, are noted for unpacking the juristic terms in which the believing comprehension of God is cast in the Old Testament, that is, in Mosaic religion, in order to get at the message or proclamation of the text about the experience and knowledge of God and what God is doing or saying in or behind the text. I have discussed in Chapter I [¶ 10] Donelson’s 2012 suggestion that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was deconstructing, in the sense intended by Jacques Derrida as distinct from the popular sense of critical demolition, certain ethical injunctions of the Torah. The gaps referenced here between the primitive cultures and ancient cosmologies reflected in both Testaments and modern cultures and cosmologies as well as the gap between the legal or juristic religion of the Old Testament and the gospel faith of the New

Testament are not to be confused with the so-called Newtonian gaps. Allen and Springsted 2007, 195, discuss the Newtonian gaps as possible openings for a religious or faith-based world view to fill in the gaps at the places and phenomena which the scientific world view has not yet explored or explained, and to recognize the necessity for the creator God to intervene at those places of discontinuity (gaps) where the self-regulating operations of the mechanistic universe of Newton's perspective contain glitches that would trigger self-destruction without some intervening correction. Or, as Diogenes Allen 1989, 45, put it:

For example, according to his (Newton's) calculations, there were slight irregularities in the orbits of the planets which would in time cause the solar system to collapse. Unless those irregularities were corrected by divine intervention, the solar system could not continue indefinitely. This was but one of several things which God needed to do to keep the machine in running order.

But, of course, the universe has thus far continued operating without the intervening divine correction, so far as we can observe, which Newton expected and thought necessary. Newton's attempt to adjust his calculations for any gaps in the perceived operations of the universe or in scientific knowledge thus far does not address the larger problem of biblical interpretation having to do with the cosmologies reflected in the Bible and the modern cosmologies of present-day interpreters. That cosmological gap is most concisely articulated by Allen and Springsted 2007, 194, in their introduction to Rudolph Bultmann's project of demythologization:

Bultmann claimed that the gospel is distorted because it is presented in terms of a prescientific cosmology. That cosmology is a three-tiered universe with life on earth placed between a divine realm above and an evil one below, with interventions into our earthly life from both realms. Such a cosmology, if taken literally and materially rather than metaphorically and spiritually, is utterly untenable in the modern world where we live with a scientific cosmology. Intellectually honest people are often repelled by this mythology and thus never encounter the gospel itself and face its scandal.

[¶17] **Some interpreters have rejected or ignored or would expunge any text of scripture that is mythical or is contrary to a modern empirical**

view of the world. But other interpreters have recognized that such texts can express *truths* in metaphorical and poetic terms that simply cannot be expressed in prose, discursive, and empirically correct terms.

G. Ernest Wright 1952, 107-128, in his final chapter, “From Recital to Modern Theology,” indicates, 118, that contemporary theologians have mainly chosen one of two approaches to dealing with the aspects of the Bible that do not fit with the modern empirical view of the world and reality nor with the discursive and propositional habits of Hellenic philosophy that so infuses modern theology: (1) demything the Bible, especially the New Testament, the approach led by Rudolph Bultmann, and (2) The more common alternative approach that recognizes that the aspects of reality, experience and *history* that are beyond empirical observation, analysis, and logical proofs, can only be expressed and dealt with by way of imagination, metaphor, intuition, stories, including mythic stories and parables, an approach exemplified in Minear 1946 and favored by Wright himself, and more recently developed in fuller measure in Borg 1994, 1997, 2001, and summed up with implications for Christian practice in Borg 2003. I have notes on both approaches (demything and metaphorizing) with citations from Bultmann, Borg, and others in the following paragraphs and passim. Professor Wright’s 1952, 116 ff., discussion indicates that the demything approach tends to require the church to choose the early church’s alliance of theology with science while abandoning aspects of the Bible considered mythological, while the metaphorical approach allows both a respect for science and for acknowledgement of the necessity of imaginative, symbolic, and mythic story-telling approaches in discussing the most ultimate aspects of reality, experience, and communal historical memory. Wright, 126-127, carefully explains that as mythically and imaginatively and metaphorically colored as many of the biblical narratives are, the collection as a whole is built around the structure of a communal memory of events that actually happened. Thus, it is clear to me that Professor Wright’s

exposition is a fair example of the “emerging paradigm” that is the basis of Borg’s historical-metaphorical-sacred matrix for understanding and interpreting the Bible.

[¶18] **Perhaps the early critics of Bultmann’s demythologization project had good grounds for some of their dismissive responses. But with regard to eschatology, the later Bultmann defends the existential demything as having already begun in the New Testament writings, especially those of John and Paul.**

Bultmann 1958, 11-21, 1957, 54-55, and 1971 passim makes it clear that the mythological worldview of the Bible is not only reflected in the pre-scientific (Hebraic and others) cosmologies of the three-tiered universe with demons and angels subverting or protecting human life, and in the supernatural or interventionist mighty works or miracles of Jesus and the apostles, but also in such theological concepts as a linear temporal future oriented eschatology featuring a cosmic cataclysm. Over against such a temporal future crisis some modern scripture theologians and systematic theologians, notably C. H. Dodd, Rudolph Bultmann, and Paul Tillich, have posited a partially or continually realized existential eschatology. For Bultmann the future element in the biblical language becomes an existential future as in “the future is now” in every encounter of grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, based in part on the Gospel of John’s reflection of a Gnostic spiritual cosmology including John’s account of Jesus’ promise of preparing a place for the believers in the Father’s house of many dwelling places and John’s notion of the pre-existent Word, reflecting a Gnostic concept of redemption. All of these notions—the Hebraic divinely created cosmology, the Gnostic spiritual cosmology, the existential present/future construct—are notions that cannot be embraced in a literal sense just because they may be reflected in the Bible. Consider homiletic theologian Haddon Robinson’s 2001, 82, dictum, which I have cited above, that “a statement is not true because it is in the Bible but it is in the Bible because it is true”

which, with reference to statements couched in pre-scientific language and cultural assumptions, leads to the hermeneutical question: *how* is that statement true? So, if those pre-scientific or mythological concepts and references are “in the Bible because they are true,” does that mean that Bultmann’s project is to explain *how* such articles are true rather than to expunge those passages from the Bible? Yes! Notwithstanding that early critics of the earlier renditions of Bultmann’s demythologization work may have had good reason to accuse him of falling into the liberal theology trap of reductionism. For example, Bonhoeffer 1972, 169, wrote in a letter of 8 June 1944, referring to Bultmann’s demythologization project, “The mythological elements of Christianity are dropped, and Christianity is reduced to its ‘essence’.” Something of the radicalism of Bultmann’s earlier presentations of his idea of demythologization and the extremes of some critical responses to Bultmann himself can be seen in Bonhoeffer 1972, 317, in Bethge’s 3 June 1944 letter: “When I was telling Justus (Friedrich Justus Perels) in passing that evening that you were preoccupied with the problem of Bultmann, he immediately said that he thought that it had been settled and that Bultmann was a man who would have to be ‘excommunicated’.” But it becomes clear as one actually reads the publications of Bultmann’s later guest lectureships in Scotland and America (edited and published in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* and *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology*) and not just *about* Bultmann and his critics that his purpose is to expose the gospel meaning contained in the mythological world view and literary framework of the Bible so that it is more readily available for the life of faith in people who are acculturated with a modern scientific view of the world. For example, with regard to the conception of Satan as ruler over the world, Bultmann 1958, 21, wrote that “although we no longer think mythologically, we often speak of demonic powers which rule history, corrupting political and social life. Such language is metaphorical, a figure of speech, but in it is the expressed

knowledge, the insight, that the evil for which every man is responsible individually has nevertheless become a power which mysteriously enslaves every member of the human race.” This would seem to be agreeable with various modern expositions of Paul’s lament and celebration over the universal inner conflict or pervasive sin and good intentions in which humans are helpless and hopeless except for Jesus Christ (Romans 7:14-25). And, with regard to the mythological concept of a temporal and cosmic, as opposed to existential, future oriented eschatology, Bultmann 1958, 22-34, observes that while the New Testament and other early church writings retain the language of a temporal/cosmic eschatology, the process of demythologization had already begun in the writings of Paul and the Gospels, especially, John, and the road toward an existential eschatology is opened, a concept further developed on pp. 80-81 of Bultmann 1958 with citations from the Gospels and the Letters of Paul, and, of course, more fully developed in his *The Presence of Eternity* 1957, 45-49, with specific citations from Paul and John, and the following summary, 151-152:

It is the paradox of the Christian message that the eschatological event, according to Paul and John, (a note refers to his previous discussion on pp. 45-49) is not to be understood as dramatic cosmic catastrophe but as happening within history, beginning with the appearance of Jesus Christ and in continuity with this occurring again and again in history, but not as the kind of historical development which can be confirmed by any historian. It becomes an event repeatedly in preaching and faith. Jesus Christ is the eschatological event not as an established fact of past time but as repeatedly present, as addressing you and me here and now in preaching.

[¶19] **While the early Bultmann was thought to be dismissing rather than interpreting or rehabilitating the supernatural miracle stories and the historical apocalyptic eschatology referenced in the Gospels, it is clear in his *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (1971) that rather than dismissing the gnosis-infused language and spiritual cosmology of the Greek cosmos conviction he, like the Gospel writers, uses that language and spiritual cosmology to interpret and communicate for the modern world of thought and experience the meaning of the life, death,**

resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ.

Barth 1991, 51-55, 102-110, discusses his view of a between-the-times experiential eschatology and its implications for preaching as “The Way of Witness.” This suggests a fulfillment that is experienced in faith as a continuing, or again-and-again revelation, Thus, a kind of partially realized or being-realized-in-our-preaching eschatology. Barth states that such a between the times eschatology is none other than Christology and it in no way contradicts the once-for-all historical Christ event or his promised historical future coming again. And, Borg 2003, 171-184, discusses “Salvation in This Life” and “Salvation and the After Life” (These citations of Barth and Borg are also referenced in Book II, n. 20 [¶ 2]). But when Bultmann 1958, 77, writes that it is only faith, and not philosophical analysis, that can provide free and complete openness to the future, it must be understood that for Bultmann, a self-affirmed existentialist, the eschatological future is already here in our encounter with Christ; each present moment of faith in Christ is an experience of a fulfilled future of hope, promise, and openness to future futures. He notes, 1957, 47, n. 1, that the few verses in John that reflect the traditional historical apocalyptic eschatology are late additions by ecclesiastical redactions of the Gospel (Note that in textual scholarship redactions are not the modern censor’s blackouts but are “revised editions” consisting of clever scribal additions, deletions, substitutions, and recastings.) And Bultmann notes, 1958, 77-78, that while he has said that one can and must decide to accept one’s own existence as a responsible human being, one cannot decide to have faith as complete openness to the future; that faith must be given in the forgiveness of sins, which is the only way one can be free from the chains and recriminations of the past and present, and thereby open to the eschatological future fulfilled in the here and now faith experience of life in Christ, a new self-understanding (80-81) (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 21]). Further, Bultmann 1958, 35-36, claims that demythologization does not mean

rejecting the Christian message but rather rejecting the primitive world view in which the Christian message is contained in the Bible: “To demythologize is to deny that the message of Scripture and of the Church is bound to an ancient world view which is obsolete.” As Paul wrote, “We have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from, us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). This view is affirmed in a press release by the University of Marburg at the time of Bultmann’s death at age 92 in 1976: “Bultmann stressed that his concern was the interpretation not the elimination of New Testament mythological arguments that he saw as opposing modern empirical understanding” (Associated Press, Tulsa World, August 1, 1976). Is Bultmann’s *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* 1971 supposed to be part of his project of demythologization? If so, then one must keep in mind that the most pervasive “mythology” in the Gospel of John is the language of a classical Greek or even a Gnostic spiritual cosmology rather than the “mythology” of the miracle stories or the “mythology” of a temporal and strictly future oriented eschatology, both of which Bultmann deals with more directly in writings other than his commentary on John such as *The Presence of Eternity* and *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. But Bultmann follows the writer of John’s Gospel in that, like John, he does not *demythologize* or *undo* the language of the Greek cosmos conviction. Rather, he *uses* it to communicate the meaning of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Therefore, perhaps Bultmann’s work is not so very far from or different from the work of the anthropologist Joseph Campbell (*The Masks of God, Myths to Live By, The Power of Myth, et. al.*). It is my understanding that Campbell did not reject his Christian faith even though his work was rejected by the teaching magisterium of his Roman Catholic communion.

[¶20] **Thinking theologically: There seem to be some commonalities of concern and purpose between Bultmann’s demythologization and**

Bonhoeffer's concept of a non-religious Christianity.

It seems that Bonhoeffer, in letters of 5 May and 8 June 1944, misconstrued Bultmann's intention by taking his work as just another liberal attempt to reduce Christianity to its essence by dismissing the pre-scientific clothing of the gospel writings (*Letters and Papers from Prison* 1967, SCM Press, 143, as cited in Fant 1975, 40-41. Fant's Bonhoeffer quote from the SCM edition can also be seen in the 1972 Macmillan Paperbacks edition of *Letters...*, 285; Bonhoeffer's assertion is repeated in the letter of 8 June 1944 [Macmillan 324-329]). Bultmann 1958, 18, specifically rejects the liberal reduction of Jesus' teachings to his superior moral and ethical injunctions. If Bonhoeffer was thinking theologically, as he claimed, in affirming that the supernaturalism, the miracles, the mythological cosmologies including the Gnostic language of the Gospel of John are part and parcel of the gospel and of the "humiliation" of Christ in the incarnation and crucifixion, then, surely, Bultmann was also "thinking theologically" in his work of interpreting the meaning for modern and postmodern people of these pre-scientific vessels whose cargo is the good news gift of encounter with God through faith in Christ, was he not? Yes, both men were thinking theologically, and in some sense, Bultmann was already engaged in something like the task that Bonhoeffer was calling for when he (Bonhoeffer) wrote in the letter of 5 May 1944, "You can't, as Bultmann supposes, separate God and miracle, but you must be able to interpret and proclaim *both* in a 'non-religious' sense" (SCM, 143; Macmillan 285). What Bonhoeffer means by a nonreligious Christianity is suggested in the following passages that are cited in Fant 1975, 77-78: "The cross of Christ destroyed the equation religion equals happiness...With that the difference between Christianity and religion is clear; here is grace, there is happiness, here is the cross, there the crown, here God, there man" (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 76-77] in relation to a comment of Paul Ricoeur on Bultmann and Bonhoeffer and

nonreligious Christianity and the sacred aspect of a life of faith, and where I have also cited a passage in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* 1955, 196-207, "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres," which can help one to understand why Bonhoeffer wanted a nonreligious or worldly Christianity).

Bonhoeffer 1972, 333, was wrestling with the ramifications of a non-religious or worldly Christianity when, in his letter of 21 June 1944, he expressed only mild alarm " - *horrible dictu* - " that while reading W. F. Otto's *The Gods of Greece*, he found "those gods less offensive than some versions of Christianity."

[¶21] **The widely abused and misunderstood word myth can be rehabilitated to mean a story full of meaning and truth that is part of the symbolic and spiritual experience and reality of a people and not merely a piece of fiction, fantasy, or unscientific perception of the world.**

Whether or not Bonhoeffer misconstrued Bultmann, it seems to me that "demythologization" is an unfortunate term if the purpose is to discover the meaning for the life of faith and the mission of the church today in "The Greatest Story Ever Told" (Fulton Oursler), our great "Christian myth" where the word myth does not signify unscientific, untrue, or fiction or fantasy but rather a story full of meaning and truth that is part of the symbolic reality of a people. Of course, if the story is old enough, it will reflect assumptions about the world that are no longer consistent with observation and reason, intermingled with memories of historical events that are just as credible and verifiable as any "recorded" history. Borg 2003, 50, quotes a definition of symbolic myth by German novelist Thomas Mann: "a story about the way things never were, but always are." Or, we might paraphrase: a myth is a story about an event that never happened that way but that interprets the meaning of something that apparently must have happened somehow, for example, the emergence of the world of our observation and experience (also referenced below [¶ 27], where I provide more of the Borg's Mann quote). Massey 1974, 27-28, asserts that all efforts to

expunge the supernaturalism from the New Testament or to tidy up the New Testament by explaining and clarifying the accounts of Jesus' birth and his resurrection are of necessity ill-fated. That's in a section headed "Truth Beyond Measure" which suggests to me that Massey is in tune with the notion of postmodernism in philosophy which acknowledges that human experience has dimensions that cannot be observed, documented, or deduced empirically. But that raises the question of just exactly how Massey meant the statement, 23, "The first Christian preachers knew the resurrection of Jesus as historical fact." Clearly, it is a historical fact that the New Testament witness indicates that the first Christian preachers knew Jesus Christ as a continuing presence among them, one who was not to be found among the dead but among the living. In a similar vein, Tillich 1963 [a], 142, wrote that since all religious experience of the Spiritual Presence, including in Christianity, is ecstatic, "all radical attempts to demythologize religion are in vain." This usage of the word ecstatic in Tillich's "system" is initiated in the Introduction of Tillich 1951, 53, where he pairs ecstatic with the alternative term self-transcendence, which suggests to me that forms of the terms transport, rapture, or even enchantment could also be used. Tillich often makes reference to people being *grasped* by the divine Spirit or the *logos* or the gospel. Tillich 1963 [a], 142, continues, "What one can and should do is to 'deliteralize' them (reports in mythological terms of the manifestations of the divine powers in religious experience) for those who are able and willing to apply rational criteria to the meaning of religious symbols." Bultmann 1958, 67-68, has himself said the same where he cautions that the mythological conceptions which are necessary as symbols or images within the language of faith must not be allowed to become literal, but "their meaning must be stated without recourse to mythological terms" (also cited in Chapter IV ¶ 63]). If that were the extent of what Bultmann means by demythologization, then the only credible objectors would be

those who say that such translation into non-mythological terms is unnecessary since people are generally quite capable of hearing or reading spiritual truth when conveyed in the faith language of symbol, image, metaphor, and mythic story. But Bultmann's demythologization is not only concerned with avoiding the literalization of the Bible's symbols, images, metaphors, and parables; it is also concerned with recasting for the modern mind those passages in the Bible that reflect a pre-scientific perception of reality and experience including cosmology, physical and mental illness, health and healing, time and eternity, epistemology—the dynamics of human knowing—and the language and concepts of Gnosticism.

[122] **There are several approaches to interpreting the Bible and historic Christian doctrine that may be more accessible, attractive, and useful than demything, such as, for two examples, a metaphorical-historical-sacramental matrix and a catalytic reading.**

As mentioned above, I find Beker's 1987, 27, as cited in Long 2005, 57, concept of a "catalytic reading" more agreeable than Bultmann's "demythologization." Another approach that I find more helpful than demythologization is the historical-metaphorical-sacramental matrix presented by Borg 2001 and 2003, which I mentioned above in relation to Barth's acknowledgement that the Bible is not only revelation but also a historical document. Of course, there are elements in Borg's metaphorical approach that amount to a kind of demythologization, that is, for discerning the meaning for our Christian walk or Way of faith in texts that the ancient world and mind could comprehend as both factual record of something that happened and also as loaded with metaphorical meaning on a different plane from factuality, but the facticity of which the modern and postmodern mind cannot readily embrace. It seems to me that the main problem with Bultmann's demythologization is its label. After all, since for Christians the four Gospels constitute the "*Greatest Story Ever Told: A Tale of the Greatest Life Ever Lived*" (Oursler 1949)

and therefore, the “Myth,” i.e. the Great “Heroic” Story (Keller 2015), by which we Christians live and learn to walk with God. Or, as Borg 2001, 31-33, has it, the Bible is sacramental in that it helps us in our experience of and relationship to the sacred dimension of reality and experience (that which Tillich 1963a calls “the Spiritual Presence” or “the Divine Presence”) that is, God. A complete demythologization would simply eliminate our Great Story altogether. I don’t know if the borrowing (or mocking?) of Oursler’s title was intentional, but a BBC television documentary presented by David Attenborough around the turn of the 21st century on the history of *Life on Earth* was also billed as “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” Borg’s personal spiritual journey from the conventional piety or sense of God in life of his Lutheran upbringing through his years of disillusioned skepticism about the possibility of humans having a real knowledge and experience of God to a later discovery and embrace of a sort of universal possibility or spiritual capacity of humans to experience a dimension of “the sacred,” a “something more” in life than that which is empirically demonstrable. Borg gives some credit to his reading of James 1902 for his late acknowledgement of the something “more” than the empirical in human experience. James introduces and develops the language and concept of “the more” in Lecture XX “Conclusions” as a way of recognizing and summing up the religious experience of people who report revelations of a presence and an influence in their life that is not empirically demonstrable. Such reports are recorded throughout James’s series of lectures, especially in Lecture III “The Reality of the Unseen” and in Lectures XVI and XVII “Mysticism” (referenced again below [¶ 25]). Borg’s disillusionment in early adulthood parallels chronologically, it seems to me, the popular journey of the death-of-God theology of the late 20th century, which according to Wolfhart Pannenberg in *Christian Spirituality*, as cited in Forbes 1989, 23, 60, was about the fact that something had died in the culture of western civilization: the ability to sense or

experience transcendence or the transcendent. A common chord between Borg and Forbes can also be seen in Forbes' statement, 25, "My sense is that most of us find it difficult to experience the sacred." Bonhoeffer 1972, 324-329, in his letter of 8 June 1944, discusses the reality of the completion of humankind's movement since about the 13th century toward autonomy, that is, practically functioning quite well in all human endeavors apart from any dependence on or reference to the 'working hypothesis' called God. Bonhoeffer goes on to mention the usefulness yet insufficiency of innovations in philosophy (i.e., existentialism) and psychology (i.e., psychotherapy) as substitutes for religion and the God hypothesis and, as well, the failure of neo-orthodox theology (Bultmann, Barth, Tillich, the confessing church, Methodist type piety, Lutheran teaching, humanitarian service, liturgical reform) to repair the damage done by modernism and the response of liberal theology. He acknowledges Barth's contribution of exposing the crisis in Christian theology, but critiques Barth's theology of revelation as coming down to a positivism of revelation. Bonhoeffer 1972, 341, 344, 346, in letters of 30 June 1944 and 8 July 1944, indicates his displeasure with the trends in the "world come of age" to push God out of the public sphere and the centers of human thought and action and to relegate God and the church's ministry to the private sphere of personal problems and the boundary issues of death, the afterlife and the eschaton (also cited in Chapter III, [¶ 79]).

[¶23] **A third example of a potentially more attractive approach than demything when it comes to interpreting the Bible and classic Christian teaching in this modern/postmodern age is that of Paul Tillich.**

Perhaps the most comprehensive and thoroughgoing, if less accessible, approach to interpreting the biblical and historic Christian doctrine that might appeal to people of a modern scientific worldview would be Tillich's method of correlating the language and other

symbols of biblical narrative and of historic Christian teaching with the language and concepts and other symbols of modern/postmodern philosophy, sociology, psychology, aesthetic culture and physical science, while working from a conceptual platform and framework of historic ontological thought. Tillich, for the sake of brevity, sometimes refers to this approach simply as the method of correlation. That's the method that Tillich has applied in his *Systematic Theology* in five Parts: I. Reason and Revelation; II. Being and God (Volume I, 1951); III. Existence and the Christ (Volume II, 1957); IV. Life and the Spirit; and Part V. History and the Kingdom of God (Volume III), 1963a. Tillich's method brings to mind for me the approach of the medieval Schoolmen, i.e., the method of Scholasticism, which was to do theology by casting biblical teaching in the language and concepts of a reformulated classical philosophy, some following the ways of Aristotle, some Plato, and some in the new and renewed idea of the Renaissance (rebirth) of learning and high culture, according to a Wikipedia article accessed January 20, 2024. (I mention in Book II, n. 15, that Old 2002, Vol. 4, 284, 327, refers to the once common practice of developing a thematic sermon out of a brief text as a kind of "Protestant Scholasticism.") A major focus in the work of the medieval Schoolmen was to come up with new and more integral and satisfactory solutions or formulations to some long standing problems, questions, and conundrums in historic Christian teaching. The best-known example of such a question/problem was that of Anselm's famous query *Cur Deus Homo*, why it was necessary to God's righteousness for him to show up as a human being in order to work the process of forgiveness and redemption of the sinful human race. The scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages included Anselm of Canterbury (sometimes called the father of Scholasticism), Peter Abelard, Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, John Duns Scots, William of Ockham, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas. The

parallel that I mentioned between the approach of the medieval Schoolmen and that of Paul Tillich might explain why some Roman Catholic theologians of today, such as Paul Knitter, would be more attracted to the product of the Protestant Paul Tillich than to that of Karl Barth and other neo-orthodox Protestant theologians. It was my reading of Knitter 2009 that prompted me to have another go at trying to read all the way through Tillich's three volumes of *Systematic Theology*. So, I think of Tillich as our premier 20th century Protestant neo-scholastic and neo-orthodox theologian. I have a discussion of Anselm and Tillich on the process of atonement in Book II, Chapter II, at 4. Season of Lent.

[¶24] **Multiple witnesses from the history of ancient cultures and primal religions to Christian Pentecostalism, modern/postmodern philosophy, anthropology, social psychology, and Christian theology attest to encounters with Enchantment, the Transcendent, the Unseen, the Sacred, and a Spiritual Presence.**

A key finding of Joseph Campbell's anthropological studies of symbols and rituals in various historic tribal cultures is, according to Campbell's statements in television interviews, a universal desire or capacity to commune with and experience transcendence or the transcendent. And it would appear that the extremes of the Enlightenment and modernism were wrong to think that such experience is limited to historic tribal cultures and/or to a tradition-bound, retrograde religious establishments and/or to ecstatically oriented sects. For example, James 1902, in Lecture III "The Reality of the Unseen," reports the personal testimonies of a number of highly educated people who gave accounts of their unmistakable encounters with a presence that was beyond all empirical examination. Recently (2021) I heard a lecture on a webinar, Austin Seminary's pandemic version of its annual Mid-Winter Lectures, by Professor Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, whose father was a Puerto Rican "pentecostal" pastor ordained in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

and who himself is ordained in the Disciples of Christ church of his grandmother and has taught at Presbyterian Columbia Seminary and at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology and at Southern Baptist related Baylor University. His theme for the lectures was "What Is It with the Growth of Christianity in the Global South?" In his first lecture, Cardoza-Orlandi documented the incorporation of a dimension of the element of "Enchantment" seen in the primal religions of Africa, South America and the Caribbean islands into Christian faith and life in the global south which takes the form of a "Daily Life Relationship with Mystery." The next day's follow-up lecture was entitled "Can the Christian Communities of the Global South Teach Us Something about Christianity and the Need for 'Enchantment'?" Part of Cardoza-Orlandi's message is that the growth of Christianity in the global south, and I infer, also in the global north in centuries past, has been dependent upon the interface and mutual influence between Christianity and primal indigenous religions. I mentioned above that Tillich 1963 [a], 111-161, asserts that the experience of the Divine Presence or the Spiritual Presence, that is, the knowledge of God by way of faith, is always an ecstatic experience, that is, a matter of ecstasy. A primary meaning of ecstasy is a state of being a little bit deranged or beyond reason. I personally relate to a tertiary meaning of ecstasy: a state of overwhelming emotion such as rapturous delight. This can happen to me during an especially moving passage in a musical concert or during the preaching of a sermon in the context of Christian worship, in which there is an articulate, heartfelt and incisive or winsome presentation of the good news of God's grace and love for all people and for all of the world as revealed in Jesus Christ. Forbes' 1989 case for calling on Christian preachers and churches, that is, "mainline" churches and preachers along with self-designated Pentecostals and Charismatics, to come together in a reclaiming of the biblical vision and phenomenon of Holy Spirit anointing for Christian witness and mission in the modern/postmodern world is serious and

sound and biblically oriented enough to be considered along with some of the other approaches to biblical hermeneutics and homiletic theology that are considered here. Another resonant chord is sounded in Borg's 2003, 46, understanding of inspiration as the movement of the Spirit in the lives of the biblical writers and their communities rather than in the notion that every word of the Bible is directly inspired or breathed by God, the latter being a teaching that is technically known as plenary inspiration. Of course, Borg's proposal of a historical/metaphorical/sacred approach to the Bible and to Christian life does not tend toward any such reclamation of the biblical symbol of Holy Spirit anointing such as Forbes calls for, but it could be considered as a possible opening; and the parallel or sympathetic vibration between Borg's experience of the sacred and the Pannenberg/Forbes experience of the transcendent is clear and resonates with me. It may seem incongruous to suggest a correspondence between the Black Pentecostal Forbes and the Jesus Seminar Borg, but Forbes' work in homiletic theology easily deflates common preconceptions about Pentecostalism. And, to be fair, the main problem with the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, of which Borg was one, was not the credible work that those Jesus scholars were doing individually and collectively but rather the publicity stunt of the reports that, for a few years, they published annually after taking a vote on which pieces of the Gospel records of Jesus' sayings and doings actually happened as written and which did not. That maneuver was possibly less helpful than Bultmann's demythologization. On the other hand, perhaps the jolts administered by Bultmann and the Jesus Seminar will help an eventual breaking out of the pattern noted somewhere in Borg's popular books wherein pastors encounter in seminary the paradigm of biblical interpretation that has been emerging since the 18th century Enlightenment and the 19th century advances in historical critical study of the Bible; and then, in their pastorates, use that paradigm very selectively and diplomatically with an admixture positivistic/literalistic language in their

preaching and teaching to the effect of obfuscating the principles and framework and procedures of modern and postmodern scriptural studies. Put another way, in Borg's 2001, 49-51, language of precritical naiveté and postcritical naiveté: our faith having survived being disabused of our youthful or precritical naiveté we have embraced a mature and knowing or postcritical naiveté and have become so comfortable with the mix of the precritical and postcritical naiveté of our faith community that it is as if we had never been disabused of our youthful naiveté.

[¶25] **Borg's historical-metaphorical-sacramental hermeneutical matrix may provide just the help that some pastors and congregations need in order to be more up front about their use of a modern critical approach to the Bible and the meaning of faith in their preaching, teaching, study, and conversation.**

Any pastor who desires to be more open and honest about the use of her critical education in preaching and teaching may find Borg's historical-metaphorical-sacramental paradigm to be a liberating guide in very practical ways for sermon preparation and effective communication. The pastor might improve his or her environment for more forthright use of the emerging paradigm of scripture interpretation by suggesting Borg's 2003 *The Heart of Christianity* to study groups in the congregation, perhaps even leading such a study his-or-herself. I myself was introduced to that book by a couple in the congregation that I have attended with my wife during our retirement years. The couple gathered several congregants in a series of small group meetings for reading and discussion, and they began by attesting that they were thrilled that Borg's approach had restored and vitalized their life of faith. Several years later an interim pastor also led a study group on Borg 2003. At that time I noticed that some of the participants struggled with Borg's, 26-41, presentation of the meanings of faith in the history of Christianity, including the view prompted in part as a religious response to the Enlightenment, that religious faith involves believing something

that is contrary to evidence, something that is “iffy.” Yet, that chapter can be a most helpful contribution because if people are to be disabused of the notion that faith requires believing propositions that are absurd, i.e., contrary to evidence, or even that we can only believe if the Holy Spirit gives—or perhaps imposes upon—us the faith to accept a pre-scientific account of a supernatural event as literally factual, then people being so enlightened and liberated from literally accepting such relics or vestiges of a pre-scientific worldview will need to have some alternative definition of faith and belief. Hebrews 11:1 does not say faith means giving assent to claims that are contrary to empirical observation or demonstration but rather faith is the conviction of things not seen, whether experienced or not. Some of us may be convinced of the reality of others’ experience without having experienced such things ourselves. That seems consistent with James’ 1902 discussion, mentioned above [¶ 22], of “The Reality of the Unseen” in Lecture III and his discussion of “Mysticism” in Lectures XVI and XVII, mentioned by Borg 2003, 61 and passim (See Borg’s index under James). As I mentioned above, Borg latches onto James’s language and concept of “the more” developed in Lecture XX “Conclusions” as a way of recognizing and discussing the experience of people who report a clear sense of a presence and an influence that is not empirically demonstrable. Borg’s discussion of four meanings of faith, including how some of those meanings have been abused and distorted in the course of Christian history, followed by some repair work in restoring those understandings of faith to their earlier or root meanings, provides just the alternative definitions and understandings of the meaning of faith and belief that are needed. Many church members have been bored and disillusioned because their preachers continue to hide their postmodern enlightenment under a bushel of obfuscation, sometimes hammering away at the insistence that some of the events recorded in the Bible are generally recognized as being based on events that actually happened, as if the congregation

might be infested with skeptics who were worried about that or people who reject any reliance on the Bible as a source of historical reality. The particular description of the basis of Borg's historical metaphorical approach that I find most convincing and helpful is in his book *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*, on pp. 44-48 under the heading of "The Bible as History and Metaphor" with the subheadings: "Narratives That Metaphorize History" and "Purely Metaphorical Narratives." This section is followed, 48-49, by a section headed "The Bible as Stories about the Divine-Human Relationship" which helps to link the historical metaphorical approach with the sacramental approach discussed, 32-33, in the preceding chapter and with the historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach expressed in Borg 2003. Incidentally, Borg's *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* 2001 is also very readable and certainly accessible to people such as Sunday School or catechetical teachers and adult study group leaders and participants and could provide a good follow-up study for a group that enjoyed a good time of faith renewal and enrichment with *The Heart of Christianity*. *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* puts the historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach to work on the Creation Stories, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible, and then on the Gospels, Paul's letters, and the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

[¶26] **It is possible within the framework of certain modern/postmodern philosophies to hold two coexisting kinds of worldview: a material worldview and a convictional, spiritual or values worldview.**

Perhaps more useful to us preachers than "demythologization," which in Bultmann 1958, 45-59, seems to be based on a significant but not exclusive embrace of existentialist philosophy (Allen and Springsted 2007, 194-195, mention Bultmann's embrace of the seminal work of the philosopher Martin Heidegger - *Being and Time* - a guiding light of twentieth century theologians

who were influenced by existentialist philosophy) are the phenomenological approach of Buttrick 1987 (which I discuss in Chapters III and IV) and the analytical philosophy approach of Zuurdeeg 1958. Zuurdeeg's approach is summed up in his Postscript, 307-308, in which a person who adheres to a modern scientific or analytical view of the material world may also adhere to a values, convictional or faith-based view of the transcendent meaning and purpose and foundations of human life and the cosmos, so long as that convictional or faith-based or values-based worldview, in its convictional teachings and traditional texts, does not presume to disqualify any empirical, analytical or observational proposition or conclusion that is inconsistent with that convictional worldview's implicit structure of the world and so long as one does not presume that such inconsistencies necessarily constitute a threat to or an invalidation of the faith teachings about human destiny and about God's actions, purposes, intentions, judgments, and mercy; or a hindrance to a faithful witness to one's encounter and experience with the unseen God. Borg 2003, 62-65, discusses the importance of our worldview both as our image of reality and as a lens through which we see reality, and this leads to his discussion of two kinds of worldviews, a religious worldview which does not contradict the empirical evidence of scientific investigations but rather sees or senses that there is something more, and claims to experience a spiritual or sacred dimension in reality. A *strictly* non-religious view, on the other hand, does follow the extremes of a modernist or pristine Enlightenment perspective in rejecting the notion of experiencing something more than or beyond the empirical evidence in reality. But Borg goes on to note that postmodernist views in philosophy and, significantly, also in physics, are at least open to the notion of experiencing something more in reality than what can be seen or demonstrated or deduced from what is seen or demonstrated. Weizsäcker 1952 explores the world view of modern physical science, including the inescapable subjective influence of scientists upon their design and

conduct of experiments, and in relationship to modern philosophical ideas. The religious approach of holding two kinds of worldviews, scientific and convictional, contrasts with the Aristotelian/Neoplatonic worldview which, according to Diogenes Allen 1989, 41, “was a physical theory that included values as part of the very fabric of the universe.” And Allen notes that “This is consonant with Genesis 1-3, in which the world is created good by God’s Word and disorder, decay, and death are introduced by human disobedience. Thus, while both the Aristotelian/Neoplatonist and the Hebrew biblical cosmologies combined or integrated physical description and a values perspective into one narrative, we who are people of a modern/postmodern world or ethos find it necessary to separate the physical or scientific description of the cosmos and a convictional or values-based perspective into two narratives. As Long 2004, 74, observes, “To describe the universe as ‘the creation’ does not pit science against faith. It simply says that if we are going to tell the whole truth of how the universe came to be, it will take more than one narrative.” It seems to me that such a multiple narrative approach might have more integrity than “demythologization.” That is, the scientific narrative can be supplemented by a faith-based or mythological narrative, and vice versa. Some of the precursors and foundations of the analytical approach of Zuurdeeg and others of his ilk can be seen in the work of David Hume (1711-1776) and other modern philosophers as reviewed by Allen and Springsted 2007, 129-185. Diogenes Allen 1989, 12, cites Austin Farrer who posits four domains that give us access to four different kinds of facts or truth: (1) specialized studies, (2) actual people and things, (3) ethics, and (4) religion. Allen provides a summary description of each of Farrer’s four domains as he discusses the challenge of presenting the possibility of Christian thought and belief in God in such a way that a modern/postmodern skeptic, or perhaps someone who has become alienated from the Christian community of their upbringing, may be able to open

their heart to the possibility of an existing and active God and a reunion with their faith community.

[¶27] **There are both truth and magic in myths when they are seen as metaphorical stories about the nature of what exists and what is experienced in reality.**

An appreciation of the power of myth, meaning, metaphor and symbol in both primitive and modern cultures along with a broader and deeper understanding of the words myth and mythological than simply the reports of “supernatural” events and visions handed down from pre-scientific times renders the term demythologization more of a hindrance than a help in understanding the meaning and message of the gospel. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 121-123, asserts that Bultmann misleads by using the words myth and mythological as referring to that which contains no truth, while Professor Wright, 121, clearly thinks that the symbols, metaphors, and stories which Bultmann calls ‘mythology’ are necessary to proclaim the biblical faith in the redeeming Lord of history. And he has citations, 123, of W. P. Montague, Reinhold Niebuhr, George Santayana, and Amos Wilder along the lines of ‘The Truth in Myths’ (title of an article by Niebuhr). Borg 2003, 50, illuminates the meaning of myth and the meaning in mythological stories in this way (also referenced above [¶ 21]):

I have been told that the German novelist Thomas Mann defined a myth (a particular kind of metaphorical narrative) as “a story about the way things never were, but always are.” So, is a myth true? Literally true, no. Really true, yes.

A more pertinent use of the words myth and mythological with reference to religion in general and the Bible in particular can be seen in Borg 2001, 71-72, in a subsection headed “The Creation Stories as Myths.” Borg asserts that the words myth and mythological are more properly or discretely used in discussions of religion in general and the Bible in particular to refer to

metaphorical stories of the beginning and ending of the world, its origin and destiny in relation to God. For the modern and postmodern mind—I paraphrase freely and interpolate boldly—it can be helpful to think of the terms origin and ending metaphorically or existentially, as ultimate and continuing source and ultimate spiritual destination in the now rather than as points on a timeline. Johnson 1999, 13, has a useful clarification of the meaning of the word myth in the study of human cultures: “As an anthropological category, myth does not refer to false stories but to narratives that seek to clothe transcendent realities with language and, by so doing, express the meaning inherent in the structures of shared life. The meaning of myth as an anthropological category is explored extensively in the writings of the popular anthropologist Joseph Campbell, some of which are listed on the front fly leaf of Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers 1991. Driver 1998, 172-175, confronts the element of magic in the mythological narratives of historic religions and he notes that liberal religion in Western society has mostly turned away from its own magic and therefore has little to offer, and its numbers are declining. And he observes, 174-175, that “to give up the idea that magic is bad science, while retaining the idea that rituals (and I would add well-told miracle stories and cherished myths and legends) do in fact bring about certain kinds of change, we must cease looking at magic and science as two means to the same end and realize instead that they are different means to different ends. At times the ends of magic and science may overlap, but they are not identical. Compared to science, magic is more holistic in its methods and aims.” Of course, one of the factors that get in the way of conversation in everyday encounters and leads to misunderstanding and avoidance in popular study groups is the negative or limited connotations in the modern world of the words magic and myth. It can be a helpful opening when someone uses different terminology such as “their heroic stories” when speaking of people in a particular cultural milieu, as is done in Keller 2015, 156, in his discussion of the

baseline cultural narratives of, say, a secular audience in an age of skepticism.

[¶28] **Modernism and Postmodernism have both made important contributions to understanding and wellbeing in life, and both contain temptations and hazards when taken to extremes of exclusivism.**

Allen and Springsted 2007, 233, note that “Just as philosophers have had to recognize that we cannot neatly separate statements into a factual component and a linguistic one, so, too, many philosophers have argued that the hard-and-fast distinction between facts and values that Hume had insisted on is also in the final analysis artificial and untenable.” That quotation is from Chapter 13 “Postmodernism: Moral Philosophy.” The term postmodernism encompasses a wide range of currents in various fields of study, activity and conversation including science, technology, the arts, literary analysis, philosophy, theology, and religious profession and practice. Inevitably, some thinkers and practitioners as well as critics and skeptics of postmodernism have focused on extremely narrow, distorted, negative, and simply bogus aspects attributed to postmodernism that makes it difficult to recognize and converse about the possible positive contributions of the idea that we are living in a postmodern intellectual and cultural environment, just as has ever been the case with words attached to new observations and characterizations of reality, including the historical analysis (criticism) of ancient texts, The Enlightenment, and modernism. It seems ironic to me that the spiritual descendants of those who could never see the positive contributions of “The Enlightenment,” “modernism,” and “the higher criticism,” seemingly failing to acknowledge that they themselves were creatures of modernity, cannot seem to recognize the positive contributions of postmodernist philosophies, even though these philosophies have thoroughly discredited and rejected the most extreme claims of Enlightenment or modernist philosophies to the effect that the empirically verifiable or visible world was the

extent of any reality and human experience worth considering. In a counterpoint to such refusal to acknowledge the positive contributions of both modernism and postmodernism, Borg 2001, 14-16, notes that “Modernity is a complex phenomenon, of course, with both impressive achievements and important limitations.” And he goes on to identify some of the great advances in such aspects of life as technology and medicine that have proceeded from a modern scientific understanding of the physical world as well as some of the negative or limiting effects including a skepticism about spiritual realities and a factualism or scientism that reduces the options in dealing with religious texts and traditions to two: literalism or positivistic fundamentalism and reductionism or snipping everything out of any religious tradition except any ethical principles that one thinks self-evident or that might be universally acceptable. Further, 46-48, in a section headed “Purely Metaphorical Narratives,” Borg discusses how it is that the modernist perspective has engendered a picture of the world as a closed cause-and-effect system with the limits on what can and cannot happen and what has and has not happened drawn too narrowly. But after asserting that “more things are possible, and more things happen, than the modern worldview allows,” Borg has this pivotal paragraph, 47-48:

The recognition that the Bible contains both history and metaphor has an immediate implication: the ancient communities that produced the Bible often metaphorized their history. Indeed, this is the way they invested their stories with meaning. But we, especially in the modern period, have often historicized their metaphors. To make the same point only slightly differently: they often mythologized their history (again, for the sake of expressing meaning), while we have tended to literalize their mythology. And when one literalizes metaphor or myth, the result is nonsense. On the other hand, when one recognizes a metaphorical narrative as such, the result is a powerful story.

Of course, as Borg, 59, notes, many passages that are historical factual accounts are also metaphorical or symbolic in their main significance. Massey 1974, 61-62, describes an exercise in analyzing the mixture of historical and figurative language in Luke’s description of Paul’s conversion experience in Acts 9:1-31.

[¶29] **Key observations from the modern/postmodern disciplines of philosophy, physics, social psychology, history, and biblical theology suggest five hermeneutic perspectives that are essential for teachers and preachers who would interpret God’s word in relation to human experience in God’s world today.**

Five perspectives that are essential for us as teachers and preachers in this modern/postmodern age to have in mind when interpreting the Bible are: (1) The postmodern philosophical recognition that there is more to human experience and reality than what can be observed and demonstrated empirically (Diogenes Allen), a perspective that can merely lead to psychologizing faith and religious experience if used simplistically, but also a perspective that people of faith have always asserted. (2) The recognition that there is more to the physical or material world than a simple closed system of straight-line cause-and-effect; the real world is more of an open system with causative forces coming from multiple directions, and there is some amount of randomness in the universe (Gamow 1960). (3) Even the very best “objective” observations, hypotheses, experiments, and conclusions of the very best of modern and postmodern physical scientists are in some way and to some extent influenced and colored by the “subjective” cultural and historical “baggage,” including learned ways of setting up and analyzing experiments, that the scientist, a human being, brings to the work and to all experience (Weizsäcker 1952). (4) The God-inspired writers of the biblical texts, like the above-mentioned physical scientists, also brought certain historical and cultural baggage to the task as they wrote down the stories of Israel and Jesus and the apostles in terms of the Creator/Redeemer’s intentions as they saw them through *Eyes of Faith* (Minear 1946). (5) The Bible contains both history and metaphor, and sometimes both in the same narrative (Borg 2001, 2003).

[¶30] **The historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach to interpreting biblical texts coheres with the turn to experience in postmodernist philosophy, as distinct from empirical observation and analysis (not that the empirical approach is excluded or dismissed).**

Borg, 2001 puts the historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach to work in reading the Hebrew Bible and in reading the New Testament. The New Testament section includes an examination of selected texts, 205-218, of Jesus' Mighty Works that contain both *intrinsic metaphorical meanings*, that are the obvious structure and usage of the story and not dependent on either the happenedness of the story or the specific historical associations of the imagery, 207, and *historical metaphorical meanings*, that is, specific imagery that is historically associated with particular elements in the story, for example, the sea imagery in the story of Jesus Walking on the Water. Such historical-metaphorical reading is of course what preachers and Sunday School and Catechism Class teachers and Bible Study Group Leaders of all theological tribes do regularly, perhaps acknowledging some popular interpretive principle such as spiritualizing, allegorizing, life-application, contextualizing, or moralizing and sometimes commenting disingenuously that the account has the added advantage of being factually true, which of course, depending on the nature of the particular text, may or may not be able to be confirmed scientifically. Certainly no teacher or preacher of any theological stripe would suggest that according to 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, "You shall not muzzle an ox," God, Moses, and Paul were focused on animal rights or on practical regulations for those who manage ox-powered grinding mills, especially since the text is about the upkeep and subsistence allowance due to teachers and preachers for their services. Would that we all had the perception, honesty, and courage of the Native American story tellers to say that whether it happened just that way or not, if you think about it, you know that it is true, as in Neihardt 1988, 5 (also cited above [¶ 7] and in Chapter III

[¶ 5]). Yet, it is true that just as there were negative extremes as well as positive contributions in modernist philosophy, so there are negative extremes as well as positive contributions in postmodernist philosophies. Borg 2001, 17, notes on the positive side that postmodernism's turn to experience helps facilitate renewed interest in spirituality and a recognition of truth in non-factual narratives and thus in metaphorical theology. Preachers should consider that postmodernism is not just another philosophical school of thought. Rather, it reflects an acknowledgment of successive eras in the general view of reality, the world, and human experience.

[¶31] **There are values in premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives on the world and human life, and there are hazards of distortion in an ideologically narrow commitment to either a premodern, modern, or postmodern perspective.**

Ronald Allen 1998, 44-51, provides a good overview of what is generally understood to be the perspectives on reality and experience and ways of communication in the premodern world, the modern world, and the postmodern world. And he has useful wisdom about "Preaching in the Postmodern Ethos." In particular, he has some helpful guidance for those preachers "who think that postmodernism's permeating relativity has obviated the category of truth," including a discussion, citing Wheelwright 1954, of two kinds of language used respectively in communicating two kinds of truth: (1) stenic language—factual observable, logical and (2) tensive language—conveys depth of non-empirical dimensions of life experience by way of story, image, symbol, and myth. Allen observes that "Most sermons contain both stenic and tensive elements" (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 59]). Keller's 2015, 121-156, discussion under the heading of "Preaching to the (Late) Modern Mind" is also instructive. Keller prefers (Late) Modern Mind to Postmodern Mind because he recognizes that a postmodern perspective

includes a modern perspective while taking exception to the strictures of the skeptical extremes of modernism. He writes, 122, of what many have called the postmodern turn in philosophy and observes that as real as is the turn toward experience and openness, the term postmodern tends to overlook the fact that underneath the discontinuities with the modern past there are even stronger continuities. I myself would recommend a postmodern perspective that includes modernity but that is open to recovering some of the wisdom of the pre-modern ages that has sometimes been neglected, ignored, or disparaged by some ideological modernists. (My thinking in that recommendation is intended to be parallel to Ricoeur's 1975, 68-69, logic when he wrote about affirming a structural analysis without necessarily embracing a structuralist ideology, i.e., the attitude that nothing matters but the text and the universal message of its genre, formula, or code, also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 37].) Thus, one can incorporate a modernist/postmodernist perspective without embracing an extreme modernist/postmodernist ideology as in a habitual explaining that a text reflects a premodern worldview but has a timeless metaphorical meaning, or pointing out the "error" of present day literalists who hold that the universal symbolic meaning of the text hinges on taking its premodern and supernatural representations literally. An example of an ideological modernist perspective can be seen in scientism, the inadequacy of which is summed up in Keller 2015, 287, n. 59, citing Alasdair MacIntyre. But whether or not the preacher finds an occasion to use the term postmodern or to engage the congregation in conversation about postmodernism in relation to some aspects of the Christian proclamation, she may very well be assisted and liberated by the most recent philosophical breaking out from the constriction of an exclusively scientific or empirical perception of reality and of human experience, i.e., extremist or exclusivist expressions of modernism, such as is summed up in Bultmann 1958, 37, "Therefore modern man acknowledges as reality only such phenomena or

events as are comprehensible within the framework of the rational order of the universe. He (modern man) does not acknowledge miracles because they do not fit into the lawful order. When a strange or marvelous accident occurs, he does not rest until he has found a rational cause.” Yet, Bultmann 1957, 92, acknowledges that the idea of science as based on observation and reason rather than tradition was not invented by the makers of the modern revolution in the physical sciences (Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, etc.), rather that concept dates back to classical Greek science and philosophy. Yet, the modern conceit that the other dimensions of human experience, besides what can be observed or deduced, are not worth considering seems to be an unfortunate byproduct of the Enlightenment period (c. 1600-1780), illustrated, according to Diogenes Allen 1989, 76, in the famous remark of David Hume (1711-1776) that any book which does not consist of mathematical reasoning or reasoning based on experience (observation) is to be consigned to the flames because “it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.” But Hume also had doubts about the common assumption of a cause and effect relationship when a certain event is always followed by a certain other event and he seems to have anticipated the postmodern turn to the role of experience in shaping human behavior, including such matters as religious belief and practice, rather than, say, a rational argument for the necessity of the existence of a supreme being as a first cause.

[¶32] **It is useful to consider the good, the bad, the ugly, the limitations, and the residual values of The Enlightenment, Deism, the Mechanistic or Clockwork Universe, Modernism, God-of-the-Gaps, Postmodernism, Non-Empirical Human Experience, and the Grace of God as known in Faith and Fellowship Communities.**

It is instructive that, according to the following paragraph in Diogenes Allen 1989, 40, some of the thinkers who helped lay the foundations of the Enlightenment and of Deist notions about the

possible existence and activity of God saw themselves as helping Christianity rather than opposing it:

As I have suggested, many Deists did not think of themselves as opposing Christianity but as its benefactors because they were freeing genuine Christianity from alien and irrelevant material. They were part of a much larger body of educated people, including Galileo and Descartes, who believed that the new mechanistic science revealed the true face of nature so that we could now read the book of nature correctly, but who continued to support a biblical Christianity. For them Christianity was needlessly vulnerable to criticism because it was intertwined with the older Aristotelian understanding of nature and with a worldview which was hopelessly inaccurate. They sought in their various ways to free Christianity from this unnecessary entanglement.

That sounds a little bit like demythologization to me. Diogenes Allen 1989, 2-5, begins his discussion of “The End of the Modern World” by describing how the breakdown of the modern mentality is seen in the general waning or compromising of the four pillars of the Enlightenment, those pillars being (1) the assumption that the notion of God is superfluous, (2) the assumption that nature and reason can furnish a basis for morality in society and in individual life, (3) the inevitability of progress through science, and (4) the assumption that knowledge is inherently good. Allen, 9, does not propose to refute the claims that postmodern philosophy tends inevitably toward relativism and religious pluralism but rather he intends to make a case for Christian thought and belief that can appeal intellectually to those who have gone beyond modernism or Enlightenment thinking to a postmodern kind of disillusion, and at the same time, also to those who are persisting in modernist or Enlightenment ways of thinking and perhaps the skepticism and disillusion that proceed therefrom. And, it seems to me, that he launches that case very well in PART I: THE BOOK OF NATURE, especially in the first two chapters of that part: (1) “The Christian Roots of Modern Science and Christianity’s Bad Image,” (2) “Has Science Replaced God?” Allen’s discussion in those chapters addresses not simply the gap between primitive and modern perspectives on the material universe including life on earth (the gap that Bultmann

addresses in his demythologization program) and the notion that came to be known as “God of the gaps” wherein theology was allowed to posit the existence and action of God to fill in the gaps where science had not yet been able to explain how things work, but also the gap identified by Sir Isaac Newton wherein some discontinuities in the perceived operations of Newton’s mechanistic or clockwork view of the celestial universe might eventually have to be corrected by a direct intervention of the creator God who made the whole thing and set it in motion. I think that must be the original context of the phrase Newtonian gap which later got coopted in the field of fluid mechanics due to the identification of fluids which do not behave as did the fluids analyzed by Newton, thus “Newtonian fluids” and “non-Newtonian fluids,” an unfortunate confusion since the first instance is a gap (in the cycles of the planets) that Newton identified and the second instance (internal pressure of fluids in confined space) is a gap that Newton’s experiments and analysis failed to reveal. Newton’s inability to explain scientifically certain discontinuities in the perceived operation of the universe and his proposal that at a certain projected crisis moment the creator God would have to take direct corrective action to prevent his universe from collapsing is also part of the source of the notion “God of the gaps.” So it’s not just a matter of leaving the as yet unexplained operations of the universe to God until a scientific explanation is discovered by humans, it is also a matter of calling on God or at least trusting God to correct any inherent flaws in the operation of his universe in time to prevent the implosion of the whole business. Of course, the phrase “God of the gaps” became a crude caricature of religion in general, implying sardonically that religious belief in God is useful and valid only in providing temporary “explanations” of that ever diminishing realm of mysterious phenomena not yet explained by science, an erroneous description since the realm of the unexplained, and thus the realm of religion, God and theological inquiry, would not actually be diminishing but be

getting relocated with both the starting line and the finish line being moved by the ever new scientific discoveries of a greater expanse and complexity of the unexplored parts and aspects of the cosmos and its biosphere. But none of that “God of the gaps” line of thinking has any intelligent relation to the experience of faith in God as creator, sustainer, and ultimate destination of all that is, the God who is known in faith as both beyond us and with us; the God who created us, goes before us, goes with us, comes behind us, and is ever drawing us closer to God’s own life and to the life of all creation including all people.

[¶33] **People of faith can think scientifically and also think theologically. The two ways of thinking can interface and interact with each other but must not be conflated or confused. The God of panentheism is the encompassing Spirit and must not be treated as a member of the universe because the encompassing Spirit is not only in the universe but is also more than, other than, and beyond the universe.**

There is a large gap between Newton’s modern mechanistic view of the celestial universe and of nature generally and the postmodern more random, relative, expanding, and open-systems view produced by later theories and discoveries in natural science and astrophysics. The apparent discontinuities (gaps) between any and all of these modern and postmodern cosmological perspectives and the notion of belief in the ongoing agency of the creating and sustaining God of the biblical and other faiths, a God who is active in history, is a matter which Diogenes Allen 1989 addresses further and more specifically in “*Chapter Nine* Divine Agency in a Scientific World.” Allen, 45-49, dismisses the notion of God of the gaps and the notion that the Big Bang theory confirms or is consistent with the theological teaching that there was a moment of creation, even though the notion of a dense mass existing before the Big Bang seems parallel to the biblical notion of watery chaos or formless void existing before God created by organizing that void into a world of heaven and earth, dry land and the deeps, light and darkness, vegetation

and animal life, etc. According to Allen, theological teaching holds that God lives apart from and before that mass or that void and before or apart from anything that existed before that void and that God created out of nothing that mass or void or whatever might have come before it. Thus, while people of faith may experience the presence and life of God in all that God has made, yet God may not be treated as a member of the created universe who can be called upon by scientists or theologians or anyone else to fill any perceived gaps in the processes of the universe, since that would make God a member of the universe, in which case God would not be the great “I am” who had life before the creation of the universe; and, as a member of the universe, could not have created the cosmos out of nothing. Thus, in order to fill any remaining gaps in human perception of the workings of the universe, scientists should keep on looking and thinking scientifically rather than temporarily assigning to God the task of filling the gaps. And theologians and people of faith should keep on thinking theologically and faithfully rather than speculating that perhaps God is deliberately keeping some of the operations of the universe secret for the sake of God’s own life of mystery. And those of us who are both scientifically minded and also people of faith should continue thinking and searching and exploring both scientifically and theologically for a better knowledge of the nature of this God-intended, God-created universe and for a better knowledge of God’s relationship with the cosmos and a better knowledge of our relationship with God’s church and God’s world, and God’s intentions in all things. Borg’s 1997 chapter “Why Panentheism” and his 2003, 65-70, discussion of “Two Concepts of God,” “supernatural theism” and “panentheism” seem consistent with Diogenes Allen’s contention that God may not be considered as a member of the universe. Borg embraces panentheism rather than supernatural theism. Thus, everything that is exists in God. God is the encompassing Spirit. In God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28, Psalm 139).

Wherever we may be in the universe, God is there too. But God is more than everywhere in the universe. God encompasses the universe. God is transcendent as well as immanent and omnipresent. As Borg 2003, 66, wrote, “Panentheism is not a modern invention but an ancient and traditional concept of God.” Thus, unlike pantheism, panentheism does not equate God with the forces and laws of the universe, and it does not support the worship of all gods of different creeds, cults, or peoples indifferently.

[¶34] **Bonhoeffer’s conviction that God must be experienced in the midst of life as it is—the good and the bad—and against the notion of a stop-gap God on the periphery of life and beyond the expanding frontier of scientific discovery is strengthened as he reads Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker’s *The World View of Physics*.**

Bonhoeffer 1972, 311-312, in his letter of 29 May 1944, has a paragraph that expands on his remarks in the addendum, 281-282, to his letter of 30 April 1944, about his discomfort with invoking the name of God within the religious community as a kind of *deus ex machina* for dealing with limit or boundary or liminal or transitional situations, and his preference for experiencing God in the middle of the village of life rather than only at the current place of the ever-expanding town limits marking the current extent of human knowledge, explanations, and answers (which I also reference in Chapter V [¶ 19]):

Weizsäcker’s book *The World-View of Physics* is still keeping me (Bonhoeffer) very busy. It has again brought home to me quite clearly how wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge. If in fact the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed further and further back (and that is bound to be the case), then God is being pushed back with them, and is therefore continually in retreat. We are to find God in what we know, not in what we don’t know; God wants us to realize his presence, not in unsolved problems but in those that are solved. That is true of the relationship between God and scientific knowledge, but it is also true of the wider human problems of death, suffering, and guilt. It is now possible to find even for those questions human answers that take no account whatever of God. In point of fact, people deal with these questions without God (it has always been so), and it is simply not true today that only Christianity has the answers to them. As to the idea of ‘solving’ problems, it may be that the Christian

answers are just as unconvincing – or convincing – as any others. Here again, God is no stop-gap; he must be recognized at the center of life, not when we are at the end of our resources; it is his will to be recognized in life, and not only when death comes; in health and vigour, and not only in suffering; in our activities, and not only in sin. The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is the centre of life, and he certainly didn't 'come' to answer our unsolved problems. From the centre of life certain questions, and their answers, are seen to be wholly irrelevant (I'm thinking of the judgment pronounced on Job's friends). In Christ there are no 'Christian problems', - Enough of this; I've just been disturbed again. (air raid alarm or prison dysentery?)

[¶35] **Understanding the distinction between *explanations—what and how—*of observed facts on the ground and *answers—who and why—to* ultimate questions of origin and purpose, can help us to manage the relationships and interactions between our scientific thinking and our theological thinking.**

Diogenes Allen's 1989 discussion in Chapter Three "The Order of the World Points to the Possibility of God" and Chapter Four "The Existence of the World Points to the Possibility of God," can help us to manage the relationships and interactions between our scientific thinking and our theological or faith-based thinking. For example, Allen, 78, makes a distinction between answers and explanations when it comes to the order and existence of the world. The Bible's affirmation that the world is intended and its identification of who intends it is an answer; whereas science's explorations, theories, and laws about the existence and order of the world constitute an explanation or explanations. Allen, 81, provides a specific example of how this distinction can help us think through some of the seeming conflicts between our theological thinking and our scientific thinking, that is, while Darwin's theory of natural selection tends to undermine Christianity's tendency toward the idea of *design*, it does not contradict Christianity's claim that the order of the universe is *intended*. Thus, Allen and others affirm that the notion of God of the gaps is not only bad science, it is also bad theology. There is neither an inherent conflict between science and faith in God, nor is there possible a consistent harmonization of the

cosmologies of modern science with the cosmologies reflected in ancient religious texts.

[¶36] **Experience and observation of the world as it is may prompt some people to ask whether the universe is all there is or whether the universe has a source, and thus become rational philosophic seekers of God. Other people who remain disinterested or objective or scientifically minded observers of nature, may, because they live within a community of religious faith or have interactions with people of such a religious community, in that context of mutual caring and with the help of the witness of scripture, have their hearts opened to the possibility of God.**

Thus far, in PART I: THE BOOK OF NATURE, Diogenes Allen 1989 has proposed that (Chapter Three) “The *Order* of the World Points to the *Possibility* of God”, (emphasis added) and that (Chapter Four) “The *Existence* of the World Points to the *Possibility* of God” (emphasis added), and he concludes in Chapter Five “The Need for God and the Book of Nature,” that the witness of nature can prompt a rational agent with needs, but not a disinterested observer, e.g., 93-95, to become a philosophic seeker of the God whose existence and choices and actions can supply or address certain basic human needs and philosophic questions or perplexities (reasons to ask whether the universe is ultimate, i.e., all there is, or whether the universe has a source, such as a creator god) which are exposed in the philosophic search for the source and purpose of the world’s existence. On the other hand, if the witness of nature does not lead one to become a philosophic seeker of God, that is if one does not acknowledge the human needs, problems, and challenges, exposed by a philosophic reading of nature, the needs that Allen enumerates on pp. 86-93 (goal-seeking, i.e., human choices among possible goals; size and incompatibility among possible goal choices; difficulty in accepting the universe as ultimate and coming to terms with the consequent finality of one’s own death; the inherent human experience of both beauty and suffering in the observed existence and order of the universe) and one remains a disinterested

observer of nature, aloof from the above listed needs and the underlying question of whether the universe is ultimate or has a source apart from its members, such as God, then it may be that because such strictly scientifically focused people live and experience life in human communities and in most cases are in contact with a living religion, they may go through the gate that opens onto the path of the witness of Scripture and faith community to God as the source of the universe, the path that is discussed in PART II: THE BOOK OF SCRIPTURE.

[¶37] **There is a logical and conceptual interface between science and philosophy (and belief systems) in a postmodern context, including the elements of belief and intuitive apprehension in all scientific work and parallels between the workings of faith and rationality in all scientific endeavor and the workings of faith and reason in all Christian theology.**

Part of the message of postmodern philosophical approaches is that an exclusive commitment to empirical observation and reason turns modern science into a belief system or an ism that allows no other dimensions of reality or human experience and perception. Diogenes Allen 1989 in *Chapter Seven* “The Reasonableness of Faith,” 128-148, discusses the interface between postmodernist developments in philosophy and postmodernist developments in science, in which he, 136, cites Basil Mitchell 1986 to the effect that:

there is a continuum of rational disciplines from physics and chemistry through the biological and social sciences to the humanities and metaphysics. At the scientific end of the spectrum there are certain fairly precise patterns of argument possible (largely because of restrictions upon their scope) which it is tempting to equate with rationality as such. But at each stage in the continuum, not excluding the first, there is discernible a broader type of rationality in which rival explanations are canvased and defensible choices made between them. The degree of analogy between each stage and the next, and the evident continuity between them, make it implausible to suggest that at some point in the sequence we encounter a decisive break such that, up to that point we have been making reasonable judgments; beyond it only existential decisions—or something of the sort.

Then Allen, 137, more specifically affirms that there is a kind of faith that is part of the

foundation of all scientific inquiry—not the aforementioned exclusion of all considerations except empirical data that turns modern science into a narrow belief system or ism—but rather the articles of faith outlined in the following quotation from a summary of the position of Michael Polanyi in Torrance, ed., 1980, 9:

We must recognize belief or intuitive apprehension once more as the source of knowledge from which our acts of discovery take their rise, for it is in belief that we are in direct touch with reality, in belief that our minds are open to the available realm of intelligibility independent of ourselves, and through belief that we entrust our mind to the orderly and reliable nature of the universe.

Behind and permeating all our scientific activity, reaching from end to end of our analyses and investigations, there is an elemental, unshakeable faith in the rational nature of things, but faith also in the possibility of grasping the real world with our concepts, and faith in the truth over which we have no control but in service of which our human rationality stands or falls. Faith and rationality are intrinsically interlocked with one another. No human intelligence, Polanyi claimed, however critical or original, can operate outside such a context of faith, for it is within that context that there arises within us, under compulsion from the reality of the world we experience, an operative set of convictions or a framework of beliefs which prompts and guides our inquiries and controls our interpretation of data.

And Allen, 137, goes on to identify four parallels between faith in Christianity and Polanyi's account of a faith which gives a context of rationality for all inquiry:

First, in both there is the belief that an interaction is taking place between human beings and that which is a reality independent of human beings. In the case of Christian faith, the reality is God. In the case of physical science, the reality is nature. Second, in both faith is not in opposition to reason, as if we turn to faith because of an imperfection in our knowledge. Rather, the entire domain of rational inquiry relies on faith that interaction takes place with an independent reality, one that is orderly and that guides us reliably toward knowledge. Third, Polanyi was aware of the fact that both theology and physical science have distinctive procedures because the realities with which they interact are very different. Theology is concerned with the source of all reality and the revelation of its intentions for us; physical science is concerned with the workings of the universe. Fourth, to interact with God so as to come to the conviction that there is a God and a God such as Christianity claims there is, requires a particular personal preparation, as we have seen. Likewise, to do a particular science requires a specific personal preparation. To grasp the results that have been achieved by a science and to contribute to its development require a personal development in a discipline that is appropriate to the realities that science investigates.

Diogenes Allen, 138, continues his discussion of the interface between postmodern science and postmodern philosophy by noting, in a paragraph that paraphrases Petersen 1968, disagreements

among noted 20th century physicists, viz., Werner Heisenberg (1901-76), Niels Bohr (1885-1962), Erwin Schroedinger (1887-1961), and Albert Einstein (1879-1955), regarding the nature of interpretations of the evidence in the area of quantum mechanics as to whether extraneous human values have influenced certain interpretations to the extent of violating “basic assumptions of science: that nature is comprehensible, that our experiences of it may be ordered, and that the knowing subject may be left out of the picture.” Allen notes that one may continue to insist that there is no scientific disagreement here since all agree on the data and the conflicting interpretations are not science but philosophy. And he concludes that a number of scientists are doing philosophy and doing it because of questions that have arisen from their scientific work.

[¶38] **Postmodernist perspectives in science and philosophy do not reject modern science and empirical examination of reality but rather acknowledge that there is something more in human experience that has always been recognized intuitively and has been culturally transmitted in communities of faith, spirituality, and enchantment.**

A postmodernist perspective in science and philosophy does not reject modern science or leave it behind. It includes it while affirming that there are other dimensions of reality and experience. While Bultmann’s project of demythologization is focused on making the gospel message accessible to the narrow scientism of modern people, he also discusses (1958, 38) the “philosophical problem of whether the scientific world view can perceive the whole reality of the world and of human life,...and reasons for doubting whether it can do so...” For example, Bultmann 1958, 40, mentions God and self as dimensions of life that are beyond science, that is, beyond examination and analysis by way of observation and rational thinking. And, 41, he argues that the conceits of modern science and technology are delusional in that they obscure the

nature of genuine freedom. And, 65, Bultmann testifies: “In faith I realize that the scientific world view does not comprehend the whole reality of the world and of human life, but faith does not offer another general world view which corrects science in its statements on its own level.” Thus, it seems that Bultmann, along with other theologians with existentialist leanings, may be reflecting or anticipating a postmodernist philosophical view. The same may be said of philosophical pragmatists such as William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1932), who make room for religion and such if it works for the good of life, contrary to the empiricism of Edmund Husserl, *et. al.* (according to Garrison Keillor’s *The Writers’ Almanac* broadcast on National Public Radio, January 11, 2017, the 175th anniversary of William James’ birth). In a similar vein it appears that some of the prominent Christian preachers in the then mainline churches of Europe and America during the 19th and 20th centuries, all of them creatures and exponents of modern scientific perspectives, reflected something of a postmodern philosophical perspective by recognizing dimensions of human reality and experience beyond the empirically observable and measurable. I have not seen the word postmodern in Fant and Pinson’s 1995, Volumes III – XII, 1703 – 1995, reportage of preachers and sermons. But the postmodern philosophical turn to dimensions of experience beyond empirical demonstration is clearly evident in the following examples seen in Fant and Pinson 1995, X: Ralph Sockman (1889-1970), X, 176, “He did not think that the Christian church could afford to retreat from the scientific method. But he did believe that the Christian faith contained more than scientific authority could understand: ‘The sane seeker for religious certainty does not outrage science. He outruns it.’” (from Sockman’s *Recoveries in Religion* 1938, 38); and George Buttrick 1892-1980), X, 268, said of God, “He cannot be demonstrated by science, for he is not an object to be demonstrated; and in any event science looks with half a mind (the analytical mind) on half a

world (the quantitative world).” These are just two examples of the kind of theological thinking that is common among many of the more highly educated ministers of the 19th and 20th centuries and of earlier centuries as well, since the knowledge of God is based on faith experience and not on empirical data. The turn to a larger horizon of experience by postmodernist philosophy simply acknowledges an awareness that has always been present in religion and in some other areas of human culture.

[¶39] **Postmodernism is anticipated or reflected in Romanticism and modern psychology as well as in Pragmatism and Existentialism. Thus, Bultmann’s demythologization seems aimed at the tunnel-vision of extreme forms of empiricism in The Enlightenment.**

A precursor or early reflection of postmodernist philosophy may be the view of history in Romanticism as discussed by Bultmann 1957, 83, where he notes “In Romanticism there was a real taste for history as part of its contest against the Enlightenment.” Bultmann 1957, 148, also seems to reflect postmodernist perspectives in his discussion of personal worldviews or self-understandings in relation to history, particularly as he defends against any suggestion of a complete relativism, as if any and all worldviews and religions had an equal claim to being consistent with reality and history. But then how could existentialism and pragmatism not overlap with postmodernism? But Bultmann’s program or terminology of demythologization seems aimed at adapting the message of revelation and faith for the benefit of extreme or exclusivist modernists.

[¶40] **The postmodernist label is claimed by some who are skeptical of any objective reality or objective moral values and by others who affirm the constructive role of religious truth claims in the realm of moral value judgments. There are openings here for shifting approaches to preaching and addressing each new generation of religious skeptics.**

Modernism is not alone in harboring extremist or exclusivist adherents of some of its principal perspectives. Postmodernism also has extremist or exclusivist adherents, as reflected in negative summary statements that describe what *some* postmodernists criticize, reject or do not believe, such as the following statements from a *Wikipedia* article accessed 08/15/2016 and citing Brian Duignan's article "postmodernism (philosophy)," parenthesis original, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, retrieved by the *Wikipedia* contributor 04/19/2016: "Some Postmodernists deny that an objective reality exists, and deny that there are objective moral values" and "A postmodernist *might* believe that there is no objective natural reality and that logic and reason are mere conceptual constructs that are not universally valid," *emphasis* added. Lowry 1997, 31, reflects on the distinction among postmodernists in the realms of philosophical, literary, hermeneutic and homiletic perspectives in the following paragraph:

Some commentators link transformative preaching style to postmodern thinking, but if that is true, the form of postmodernism is not the radical form—seems to me. Between the *skeptical* and the *affirmative* postmodernists (as Pauline Marie Rosenau would define things),⁸⁴ most I have read would be in the affirmative camp—or who in biblical narrative studies would be called revisionists.

And Lowry, 50-51, provides an example of the possible implications of this distinction in the discussion of "what is truth" with the mystical poet serving as the reluctant but affirming postmodernist as contrasted with the skeptical postmodernist regarding religious truth claims. Allen and Springsted 2007, 247-252, have an especially instructive discussion of the positive effects for Christian theology and the life of Christian communities of the contributions of the postmodernist philosophy of the Gadamer–MacIntyre–Taylor variety. It is not as if Christian believers needed permission from postmodernist philosophers to embrace and proclaim our faith. We and our forebears have been doing that for 20 centuries and were not stopped by the advent of modern science, the Enlightenment and historical analysis of the Bible. Yet, we should

recognize that postmodernist philosophy can assist us in helping a new generation of young skeptics to see that an exclusivist empiricism is in itself a faith commitment that voluntarily blinds itself to a portion of reality, a reality that includes other dimensions of human experience besides the dimensions that can be empirically or objectively demonstrated by observation and reason. In the area of homiletic theology, Lowry 1997, 52, depicts a delectable and tantalizing tentativeness and excitement with respect to preaching and religious truth claims; and he mentions the key metaphors for this “eloquence of the provisional” that are used respectively by several homiletic theologians including himself (evoke): Craddock (align), Placher (pattern), Browne (gesture), and Buttrick (dance). And he concludes that given such proximity to the way of God’s Word in the world, the divine, the ineffable, the mystery, the proclamation (*kerygma*), we dare to move toward the *eloquence of the provisional*, “which may be less than we think we want, but certainly is more than we might have reason to expect.”

[¶41] **Here is help from some key postmodernist thinkers for all who would grow as persons and make a constructive contribution toward the growth of others: Begin by recognizing that we in our viewpoints and commitments are products of the place and history that produced us just as others in their viewpoints and commitments are products of their place and their histories and that each of our histories reveals both constructive credits and destructive deficits.**

Allen and Springstead, 228-232, offer a key insight taken from postmodern thinkers of the deconstructionist, phenomenologist, and liberationist variety, including Foucault, Derrida, and Levinas: even if we insist that there are certainties and absolute truths in the physical realities of nature and the spiritual realities of divine revelation we must still acknowledge that our perception and expression of those certainties and truths are influenced and shaped by our particular experience and histories and by the cultural conventions and histories of the ethnic and

religious communities in which we live; and that requires us to maintain a decent level of respect and openness toward those who have a different experience and cultural history from ours, that is, toward the “other.” Of course, we have sufficient warrant in the biblical faith for maintaining a decent level of respect, kindness, and openness toward the “other”—all are created in God’s image; pursue peace with everyone; etc. But if we wish to engage others in conversation, perhaps we should accept a basis of openness that has the same acknowledged claim on them as it has on us, namely, the fact that our respective intentions are shaped by our respective experiences and the traditions of our respective communities. Such an approach could also improve our conversation with fellow Christians of different theological persuasions or ethnic or denominational backgrounds. Allen and Springsted also note that Levinas, like his fellow Jewish philosopher, Buber, would take us further than respect and openness toward the other by asserting that we only become ourselves and recognize our intentions when we encounter the “other” and take responsibility for the other. A compelling example is seen in a theme shared by two modern American writers, Henry James (1843-1916) and James Baldwin (1924-1987): “the failure of Americans to see through to the reality of others,” according to Baldwin biographer David Leeming as cited by Glaude 2016, 49-51. Baldwin’s 1965 essay for *Ebony* magazine titled “White Man’s Guilt” ends with a reference to James’ novel *The Ambassadors*. We are urged to live and trust life: it “will teach you, in joy and sorrow, all you need to know. And, according to Glaude, “...who we are as creatures of history remained central for Baldwin. As he wrote in *Ebony* (August 1965) ‘People who imagine that history flatters them are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world.’”

[¶42] **Encounter with Jesus Christ may set a person free from his or her history, cultural context, and religious tradition for a new life of**

historical decision but only in the fleeting moment of such spiritual transformation; and even in that moment the narrative of one's cultural and historical context adheres closely.

It can be argued, as does Bultmann 1957, 45, that "The one justified by faith is set free from his past, from his sin, from himself. And he is set free for a real historical life in free decision." But that vision is surely real only in each eschatological but fleeting moment of transformation in Christ. The continuing reality surely partakes of both Baldwin's caution and Bultmann's promise. We always approach any person, situation, or object with the intentionality of our consciousness intact, according to Husserl and other philosophers discussed by Allen and Springsted 2007, 198-199, and even, 245-246, with the positive prejudices of our value system according to Gadamer. Bultmann 1958, 45-59, for example, indicates that one should choose or at least recognize the philosophical framework, that is, a general view of reality and experience, from which one approaches the text of the Bible, even though philosophy cannot establish or include one's experience and knowledge of God. Allen and Springsted, 234-237, also discuss, relying heavily on the work of Charles Taylor and Alastair MacIntyre, the notion that any efforts in the past or present philosophical movements, that is, both the rationalizing, systematizing work of modernists and in the deconstructionist work of postmodernist philosophers, to decouple moral principle, or the rejection of moral principle, from the narratives of particular cultural contexts and traditions are misguided, misinformed, and/or self-deluding.

[¶43] **The canonical approach to interpreting the texts of the Bible (canonical criticism) follows upon the development of modern textual analysis (literary criticism) beginning in the 15th-16th centuries Renaissance period and the development of historical analysis of textual origins, transmission, editing, sifting, reshaping and rearranging (historical/redaction criticism) following the 17th-18th centuries Enlightenment period, and the 20th century development of comparative**

midrash by Jewish scholars. Canonical criticism, as such, was developed by Christian scholars in the late 20th century and seeks to understand the texts of the Bible, especially in the New Testament, in light of the canonical process of historical development and in relation to the canon as a whole, sometimes paying especial attention to the circumstances and intentions of the final redactors.

Fuller 1987, 335, notes that the idea of devoting a whole year to a single Gospel in the three-year lectionaries developed following the Vatican II Ecumenical Council of the early 1960's was inspired as he understands it by redaction criticism, which is concerned with the theologies of the latest stratum in the Gospel tradition, and with the editorial work of the Gospel writers seen as evidence for their respective theologies. Or, as Borg 2001, 52, n. 1, expresses it, "Redaction criticism focuses on the intentions of the author(s) (redactor[s]) who put the document into its final form." More generally, redaction criticism is concerned with the layers of editorial work in the history of textual transmission. But Fuller's observation and that of Borg allude to the focus on the final redaction by some scholars in the late 20th century in an approach referred to as canonical criticism, which according to Borg in the note mentioned above "seeks the meaning of passages within the context of the canon as a whole." James Sanders 1972, ix-xx, issued "A Call to Canonical Criticism" and thus helped launch the scholarly program of which Brevard Childs has become a major and a most exhaustive exponent. Evans and Sanders 1993, 11-13, present a description of canonical criticism and its significance in the toolbox of modern biblical studies which contains Literary, Form, Historical, Tradition, Redaction, and Midrashic criticism. Barr 1983, 105-107, puts the recent emphasis on literary analysis of the final redaction, which became a kind of launch pad for the development called canonical criticism, in larger historical perspective by noting that, contrary to some conventional wisdom, modern biblical scholarship is not a creature of nor controlled by modern historical science which is a creature of the eighteenth

century Enlightenment but rather stems from and is more influenced by literary analysis which is a creature of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries Renaissance. And, 156, he discusses differences between Sanders' approach and that of Childs. Sanders 1984, 18, takes note of Childs' attribution of the term canonical criticism, which Childs dislikes, to Sanders; and Sanders agrees with Childs that canonical criticism is not just another technique in historical criticism but is a developing approach and stance for reading biblical texts in the context of the Bible as a whole, that is, the Bible in full canonical context and as sacred scripture (Childs) and the Bible as the book of believing communities—synagogues and churches (Sanders). Sanders 1984, 30, also acknowledges agreement with Childs' assessment in his critique of Zimmerli's separation of some scriptures into text and commentary that Zimmerli has "missed the significance of the canonical process in which the experiences of Israel with the use of its authoritative writings has been incorporated into the text itself as part of the biblical witness." And Sanders 1984, 21-45, explains in Chapter II, "Canonical Process," that canonical criticism is interested in how the canonical writings developed and were transmitted in antiquity in the context of believing communities where the canon was gradually shaped and reshaped by inclusions and exclusions by way of repetition and selectivity; and texts were sometimes resignified or repurposed by way of repetitive pedagogical and liturgical use with interpretations, applications, and redactions (scribal additions, subtractions, rearrangements, and recastings—not the popular use of the word redaction today, i.e., obliteration of portions of a document with a black marker) to address new communal needs and situations until at some point the canon and the text of scripture became stabilized.

[¶44] **Inspiration of scripture refers not only to the inspired work of individuals such as priests, prophets, apostles, and scribes/editors but**

also to the work of the Holy Spirit among believing communities at various stages and situations along the historical way of textual development (redaction) and transmission.

One distinctive feature of Sanders' description of the canonical process is the role of believing communities in the God-inspired work of developing sacred scripture. Sanders 1984, 39, contrasts this with the conventional notion that God inspired individual geniuses (priests, prophets, scribes, chroniclers, apostles, evangelists [Gospel writers], and divines [theological teachers]) who wrote the original manuscripts on which the Bible is based. That notion of inspiration as a strictly individual phenomenon detached from the work of the Holy Spirit in believing communities at different stages and situations along the historical way of textual development and transmission has led to misunderstandings, problems, and distortions by scripture scholars of various doctrinal or ideological persuasions; for example, what to do with so-called spurious or inauthentic texts, as if only the source or earliest documents were inspired by God and every subsequent change, omission, or addition was not inspired by God. Sanders, 26, discusses how a new approach to the study of early Jewish interpretation that emerged in the 1950's known as comparative midrash—comparing how various interpreters [individuals and communities] through history have understood, used, and applied texts of scripture—contributes to the developing study of canonical process. I have cited in Chapter III [¶ 9] some references to the meaning of midrash in relation to Buttrick's critique of how some lectionary preachers have divorced their scriptural interpretation from present day public issues of social justice and in relation to Sanders' 1972, xii-xxv, discussion of the meaning of comparative midrash as part of the scholarly context of his initial call for canonical criticism. Johnson's 1999 approach resonates very well with Sanders' description of canonical process in many respects. For example, regarding the memory of Jesus Christ in the early Christian communities where the New Testament writers were recording their

memoirs, Johnson, 138, indicates that the church's memory of Jesus was partly shaped by the needs and questions of life together. Yet there *was* something to remember. The memoirs were not created out of imagination. Another example of how Johnson's "experience model" of interpretation resonates with Sanders' canonical process is seen in Johnson's, 259-452, application of his experience model to the Pauline Traditions. Specifically, regarding Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Johnson, 327, wrote: "Here he moves beyond an apparently narrow parochial problem (the oppositional and conflicting teachings that were troubling the Galatian churches) to the deepest questions concerning life before God. In the process he allows his own and the community's personal religious experience to reshape their shared symbolic world in a radical way." Johnson, 610, also has a statement that relates somewhat to Sanders' notion that in the canonical process of the early church it was natural or perhaps ecclesiastically inevitable and necessary that the canon (which writings are included) and the text (which version or form or edition of those writings) should eventually become stabilized (the word that Sanders favors over closed):

It is the nature of a canon to be closed. An unlimited canon is no longer a "rule," just as a twelve-inch ruler cannot gain inches and still be a one-foot ruler. Because it is closed, the canon is able to perform its function mediating a specific identity through the successive ages of the church. Because the church today reads the very same writings as were read by Polycarp, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Bonhoeffer, it remains identifiably the same community. Only such a steady measure can provide such continuity. If a lost letter of Paul's should be discovered, there would undoubtedly be great excitement. But there would be no expansion of the canon, for that letter, from the time of its composition until the present, has not shaped the identity of the universal church.

[¶44.1] **The continuing canonical process of transmitting the message of scripture to new generations is done by sometimes resignifying or repurposing the words to meet contemporary needs and circumstances, not through any actual redactions (deletions, interpolations, rearrangements or recastings) of the settled canon but through interpretive work in study, discussion, writing, teaching and preaching.**

It is on the basis of comparative midrash and Sanders' communal understanding of the canonical process in antiquity that canonical criticism sees the canonical process continuing through history after the stabilization or closing of the canon, as believing communities embrace the values reflected in the canonical sacred writings and continue the canonical process of transmission, sometimes resignifying or repurposing the texts to meet contemporary needs and circumstances, not by amending the settled canon but through reading, studying, interpreting, preaching, teaching, living, praying, and applying the scriptures. Sanders 1984, 59, mentions the slavery issue that split the American Presbyterian church (and others) in the 19th century to illustrate his contention that each generation must ask in its own way the central questions of faith in order to continue the canonical process, including canonical hermeneutics, by repurposing or resignifying texts of the Bible as necessitated by time and circumstance. Sanders indicates how slow this process can be by noting that 122 years had passed before the Presbyterian rift was mended, which, by the way, was done in a north-south reunion in 1983, the year before Sanders' 1984 publication. Such reassessment of the central questions of the faith by each generation in continuing the canonical process including canonical hermeneutics requires more study of how canonical traditions, figures, ideas, and texts have functioned in particular moments of time (synchronic) along with tracking how that functioning has changed through historical time (diachronic), according to Sanders 1984, 61. The available tools for such study that Sanders mentions here are comparative midrash (comparing how texts, symbols and ideas have been interpreted and used by various persons and communities in different times and places) and the isosceles triangle graphic which he displays, 77, with the hermeneutics of God's freedom and grace at the apex, the tradition or text being called upon, recited, or alluded to at the angle at the left end of the base, and the historical and sociological context addressed at the angle at the right

end of the base. This hermeneutic triangle brings to mind the notion of a hermeneutic circle which acknowledges the subjective dimension in textual interpretation wherein the interpreter's perspective affects the interpretation and the text has an impact on the interpreter's perspective. The triangle gives the interpreter's perspective binocular vision, as it were, not to say two legs to stand on. Childs 1992, 70-79, articulates a canonical approach to biblical theology and hermeneutics in the context of the ongoing (second half of the 20th century) ferment in postmodern, post critical biblical scholarship. Craddock 2002, 62, citing Ricoeur 1975, indicates that the hermeneutic focus on the final redaction or canonical text is an extension or expression of the emergence of literary criticism from its role as a servant of historical criticism into "a new life as a genuine investigation of the literary forms and communication skills of biblical materials." That partial emergence of literary analysis of scripture from the shadow of historical criticism brings to mind the fact that, as mentioned above, the literary approach that grew out of the Renaissance and Reformation period predates the historical approach that was triggered by the Enlightenment.

[¶45] **The interpretation of an ancient text involves a necessary interplay between the history of its transmission and the cultural context and experience of the interpreter and that of his or her audience/readers.**

Allen and Springsted 2007, 196-207, discuss the immediate philosophical background in phenomenology of a performative, structural semiotic, and "new hermeneutics" approach to texts and sermons, particularly in the work of Husserl, Scheler, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Bultmann, Ebeling, and Sokolowski. Allen and Springsted, 244-252, also discuss the implications of a postmodern approach to moral philosophy for the interpretation of canonical texts; the concept and reality of *phronesis*—practical knowledge and reasoning that one inherits by being

born and by living within a community: it is impossible to divorce the interpretation of a text either from the transmission and redaction history behind the text or from the language and cultural values and experience of the interpreter's community, including, 245-246, an acknowledgment, citing the work of Gadamer 1986, of the inevitable function, for good and ill, of historic-cultural "prejudice" in the interpretation of texts. Keller 2015, 99-103, reviews briefly for homiletic purposes how contextual communication is an inevitable, necessary and ever-present aspect of addressing the Christian message to an ancient pagan culture ("foreign" missionary work) or to contemporary secular culture ("home" missionary work). The common thread in canonical criticism and the semiotic approach is clear in Ricoeur 1975, 29, referring to Dan O. Via's attempt to add a formal analysis in the structural sense of the term, to "historico-literary criticism": "But the kind of *intelligibility* expressed by structural semiotics is *anti-historical* by nature and it tends, in its most extreme and fanatical use, to dismiss all historical inquiry concerning the redactional stages of the text and even, in a kind of provocative way, to emphasize the *last* text, the one we read." Ricoeur 1975, 54-63, demonstrates the structural semiotic approach using the explanation given by Louis Marin of the Parable of the Sower and its allegorical interpretation in Matthew 13:1-23 as an example. Scholes 1974, 16 and passim, discusses the beginnings of a science of semiology as an aspect of structuralist thought. (Ricoeur and Scholes are also referenced on this above [¶ 14].)

[¶46] **There are some commonalities shared by the interpretive approaches of canonical criticism and structural semiotics and the church's historic embrace of pluralism or diversity in the Bible's message; but there is not any unifying distillation that would compel the scriptures to support any theological commitment extracted from one part of scripture or another or any supposed complete synthesis of the divergent parts.**

The programs of canonical criticism and structural semiotics may be seen in some ways as a

possible answer to Dodd's 1962 [1937], 74, call for scripture scholarship to move on from dissecting the New Testament writings to reveal their diversity to a demonstration of the basic unity of their message in setting forth the one gospel. That is, Dodd first called for a shift in critical scholarship from analysis of the differences or the many sidedness in the texts to producing a synthesis, but changed his call from synthesizing to *finding* or *identifying* the synthesis already present in the received texts in the one gospel or *kerygma*. Is that not something like James Sanders' call and Childs' project of canonical criticism as well as Dan O. Via's program of structural semiotics: identifying the synthesis or unity produced by or maintained throughout the stages of the canonical process of transmission, exclusions, inclusions, and redactions? This suggests a possible project of comparing Dodd's outline of the apostolic preaching or *kerygma* with the outline of Irenaeus' rule of faith (*regula fidei*) that Childs claims as an interpretive guide with perhaps an analysis of how each of these two distillations or summaries might have been influenced by the historical context of its latter day author—Dodd of the outline of the apostolic preaching and Childs of the outline of the *regula fidei* of some early church spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers. On the other hand, James Sanders 1984, 36-37, indicates in his chapter on "Canonical Process" that his brand of canonical criticism has abandoned earlier efforts of the biblical theology movement to discern the so-called unity of the Bible in favor of embracing and celebrating the pluralism of the Bible as a strength that enables the Bible to be self-critical and self-correcting and to survive many changes and challenges by way of the varied thrusts and statements that it records. Similarly, Johnson 1999, 157, observes, in a statement that I quote more fully below [¶ 52], that an awareness that the final stage of composition (the received canonical text) resulted from a complex oral and written process not only makes us sensitive to the peculiar density of these texts but also makes us more appreciative

of the simplicity and coherence of their finished condition. Yet, he also, 603-604, reminds us that the church's rejection of Maricon's (2nd century) abbreviated and heavily edited canon of scripture and rejection of Tatian's (2nd century) Diatessaron, a harmony or synthesis of the Gospels, shows the church's rejection of any kind of theologically unifying, synthesizing, or harmonizing inner canon and the church's embrace of a scriptural canon that is ultimately pluralistic, that is, does not base itself on a completely unitary or homogenous theology or approach, as witness the discrepancies or dissonances between Old Testament and New Testament or between Paul and James.

[¶47] **Interpretation of texts requires help from inside the text—its structure and present signification—and from outside the text—its origin and historical transmission.**

Ricoeur 1995, 129-139 (this chapter originally 1971 in French), discusses the necessary interdependency of generic (historical, source, redaction) analysis and structural (literary, form) analysis that perhaps presages some of the debate over canonical criticism. Ricoeur makes a strong case that interpretation from inside a text (literary/structural analysis) necessarily leads to the need for help from outside the text (historical/generic analysis) and back and forth between the two. Ricoeur's alternation between diachronic (historical/generic) and synchronic (structural/semiotic) analysis is sometimes referred to as a semiotic approach in that the text has become a sign or symbol of a value or faithful perception of reality and God quite apart from any status that the events recorded in the biblical text may have as historical occurrences. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 83, 87-88, observes that since both the law and the prophets (and we would add the writings of the New Testament) are historically conditioned and thus cannot be made to fit every later situation without serious reorientation (recontextualization), God has provided, along with

and in addition to his Word in divinely inspired texts, his Word in prophets priests, scribes, apostles, preachers, and teachers in every age to interpret by way of inference the meaning and implication of texts for new occasions. That is, God provides teachers in every time and situation for the purpose of recontextualization. Wallace 1995, 24, in his Introduction to Ricoeur 1995, provides a useful overview of Ricoeur's focus on an intrinsic approach to the interpretation of texts as they exist in partnership with historical understandings of the transmission and development of texts from their original situations in life. I see a strong correspondence between Child's view of the canonical text (final redaction) as a witness to the faith of a religious community, which I reference specifically below [¶ 50], and Ricoeur's view of the canonical text (final redaction) as a repository of sacred signs and figurative language. But I also see an important divergence between Ricoeur's acknowledgement of a continuing role of historical analysis in the interpretation of the received texts and Childs' view that too much emphasis can be put on understanding the intentions, needs, and cultural environments of the faith communities behind the shaping of the text at earlier stages of transmission than the last, the last being the stage at which the canon and the text became fixed, i.e., stabilized and closed.

[¶48] **Interpretation of texts for present day audiences involves recognition of the dynamic interplay between the multilayered contexts of the text on its travel through time and space and the multilayered contexts of interpreter and audience in the here and now.**

Troeger 1990, 122-124, quotes Northrup Frye and Robert McAfee Brown regarding some provocative perspectives on the renovated literary and textual criticism that have followed on after the first hundred years of the historical/critical study of the Bible, to the effect that a new flurry of hermeneutic reflection has exposed a bogged down higher criticism "in which disintegrating the text became an end in itself" (Frye), and a gradual dimming of vision in the

usually privileged practitioners of the higher criticism to the point of failing to notice and identify with the perspective of the biblical writers, that is, the perspective of the poor and oppressed, those who lack earthly comforts and who are victims, having been cruelly used by society (Brown). Of course, a newer hermeneutic based more on textual criticism than on historical criticism can also get lost in the details and fail to make the crucial connections for relating the people and situations in the text to the people and situations in the present age. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 71, after identifying the basic themes of the Hexateuch according to Professor Gerhard von Rad, “creation, call of the fathers of Israel, promise of land, sojourn in Egypt, enslavement, population growth, deliverance, wilderness, inheritance (conquest and occupation!!) of promised land,” writes that “The proper use of form and literary criticism, therefore, is not simply to atomize the contents of the books, but rather to understand the manner and purpose in which and by which such a variety of materials have been used to expand the theme.” Ricoeur 1995, 145, discusses the importance of imagination in the process of decontextualizing from the then and there of the text and recontextualizing to the here and now of the interpreter (or preacher) and the readers (or hearers) in the reading (or preaching) of biblical texts. He, 157-160, uses the parable of the sower in Mark 4:1-9 and its interpretation by Jesus in Mark 4:13-20 to demonstrate how a semiotic approach differs from a strictly historical-critical exegetical approach. And he, 170-171, proposes reading the Bible as one vast intertext, taking into account the historical-critical method but not reduced to it, rather going on from reestablishing the *Sitz-im-Leben* (situation in life) of diverse literary layers (sources) and their narratives and proclaimed institutions to analysis from the standpoint of their present *Sitz-im-Wort* (situation in word). Don Wardlaw 1983, 60-83, describes an approach to shaping sermons by the context of the text and the context of the preaching, in which, it seems to me, he exemplifies Ricoeur’s observation that dealing with the

context of the canonical text (final redaction) requires a round trip through historical analysis to the context of the situation represented in the earliest available source and back to the present context of the preacher and his or her hearers. This suggests to me that one may not be able to accurately identify the context and intention of the canonical text without a study of the context and intentions of earlier layers of the tradition.

[¶49] **Some of the hazards and past errors of a strictly historical approach to interpreting ancient texts can be avoided or corrected by the use of an “experience model” of interpretation that takes into account a wider range of social, theological, and political factors in both the context of the there-and-then and the context of the here-and-now than have sometimes been considered.**

Johnson 1999, 1-19, identifies serious problems, omissions, or shortcomings in the strictly historical model of interpreting texts of religious or faith communities in general and texts of the New Testament in particular. He then, 10-16, outlines “An Experience-Interpretation Model.” And, 21-153, he lays out the premises of an Experience-Interpretation Model as applied to the writings of the New Testament in terms of “The Symbolic World of the New Testament,” 21-91, including, 76-78, rabbinic approaches to interpreting texts of the Hebrew Bible that were part of the background and setting of the New Testament writers, having been developed out of the experience of the Jewish diaspora, and “The Christian Experience,” 93-153. After that, Professor Johnson, 155-592, deftly applies the “Experience-Interpretation Model” to The Synoptic Tradition, 155-257, Pauline Traditions, 259-452, Other Canonical Witnesses, 455-505, and The Johannine Traditions, 521-592. All of that provides a platform and background for an *Epilogue* in which the New Testament is seen as the church’s book, that is, as the later part of the church’s canon, the earlier part being the Old Testament. Johnson, 288-289, provides a compelling example of how easily the development of a sermon that is structured to do for the congregation

in the here-and-now something similar or parallel to what the text was structured to do for the original auditors in the there-and-then can go awry or become unhinged and mislead the hearers about the original setting and intention of the text without a thorough understanding of the literary and historical context of the scriptural text; that is, for example, as the common misuse 2 Thessalonians 3:10: “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.” How one uses this much abused text in teaching and preaching may be quite different when one realizes that it does not reference people who are lazy or indolent or whose sense of responsibility has been crippled by socialism or a compassionate economy of public benefits that has the unintended consequence of creating a trap of dependency. Rather, it references people who have been led astray by a panic driven response to religious persecution and a sense that the day of the Lord and time of the last accounting is imminently at hand, that is, people who leave work and other ordinary duties in favor of total devotion to waiting for the imminent appearing of the Lord. Of course, that knowledge of the more likely social context of the passage in its origin does not rule out the legitimacy of resignifying or repurposing or recontextualizing the text for use in a modern-day teaching and preaching situation. But our present-day teaching and preaching will surely be more convincing and have greater integrity if we are aware of how we are resignifying, repurposing, and recontextualizing the text and if our teaching and preaching are up front and candid about what we are doing. Such close attention to the historical situation in life behind the canonical text illuminates the fact that the approach known as canonical criticism does not eschew historical analysis altogether but rather learns to use the canonical process and canonical hermeneutics that were at work in the transmission, redaction, and canonization of the text while adapting the historical setting of the canonical text as received for teaching and preaching in our own believing communities today.

[¶50] **The New Testament can be seen as a witness to the faith of the early church and the outline of that faith can be seen as a kind of inner canon or a “rule of faith” for interpretation of that text.**

Beginning with the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) concept of the early church teacher Irenaeus, Childs 1992, 31-33, posits a rule of faith interpretive guide (canon!) imbedded in the canonical scriptures themselves, 336, namely the work of the earliest purveyors of the Christian scriptural tradition from the first scribblers to the final redactors, 104, 343-4, and asserts that honest biblical theology and hermeneutics require treating the canonical text as a historical *witness* to the church’s faith experience rather than as a *source* record of historical events, 97-8. Cullmann 1949 discusses the early church “rules of faith” as the earliest Christian confessions, brief summaries of the essential elements of Christian beliefs and practices and how these statements were used in early Christian communities. Childs holds that the canonical form of the Old Testament and the New Testament and the process of canonical formation are “not a shell to be removed but rather a testimony to be understood” 442. That is, scripture interpreters should look to understanding the intention of the final form of the text and not just to the intentions of the component sources and stages of development of the text. Childs’ purpose is articulated in 1992, 262-265. Thus, it develops that in the writings of Childs, e.g., 1992, 56-69, the word canon comes to refer as much to the rule of faith hermeneutic per Irenaeus as to the accepted list of writings included in the Christian Bible. Brueggemann 2005, 153, gives a summary review of how Childs’ use of the word canon evolves in the course of his work. Buttrick 1987, 475, has a somewhat dismissive reference to “so-called canonical criticism.” But I see some similarity between Buttrick’s occasional reference to the New Testament witness as “the church’s memory of Jesus Christ” and Childs’ view of the Bible as a witness to the church’s faith rather

than as a source record of historical events. Perhaps Buttrick would rather be associated with Ricoeur's semiotic approach than with Childs' canonical criticism approach.

[¶51] **There is an ongoing process of mutual creation, sustenance, and maintenance between the church and canonical scripture.**

Barr 1983, 47-48 (also 1980, 113, 118-120) uses the same datum that Childs uses, i.e., the church's faith came before the church's Scripture, as added fuel for his exhaustive and sometimes searing critique of the canonical criticism program. Barr 1980, 120, notes that the idea of canon is late and is not essential to the category of scripture. That is, the category of canon was foreign to the Judaism of New Testament times and to New Testament Christianity. Barr 1983, 67, challenges Childs' use of canon as a hermeneutical guide. Childs 1992, 670, answers Barr on this issue to the effect that Barr had misconstrued the issue by supposing that the hermeneutical value of the concept of canon is neutralized by the fact that some hermeneutical problems remain unsolved and cannot be resolved by the use of so-called canonical criticism. But Barr 1983, 131-134, also challenges Childs' contention that the biblical theology movement tended to neglect the final redaction of canonical scripture in its preoccupation with source documents and faith communities of origin. Craddock 1983, 109, observes that while the New Testament is a product of the early church both in writing and in selection from many available Christian documents, and while the church has a continuing right to lay hands on its book in bold investigation, yet the New Testament is the Scripture for the church and before it the church is to sit in obedient submission, open to guidance, discipline, and judgment. He reprises that perspective in 2010, 128-129: a reciprocal relationship between the church and the scriptures; and in 2011, 11: "the community sits under the Bible, but the Bible is the community's book." Deiss 1976, 266, tries to strike a balance: the church is created and sustained by the word; yet, originally, the word of scripture was

created by the church, but he, 278-279, discusses the “Priority of Event over Word,” meaning, for example, the reality of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and continuing spiritual presence in the world as known among communities of faith is more important than the New Testament’s written witness to it. Lischer 2001, 57, observes that “While it is proper to say that the church created the canon to norm its proclamation, it is more accurate to say that the gospel itself, through its various oral modalities and uses in the church, created the canon, and that the church merely recognized it.” On the other hand, Ricoeur 1995, 71, discusses how Christianity, founded in historical manifestation (the revelation in Jesus and the apostles), quickly became a word-based religion (revelation in scriptures). Johnson 1999, 610, (3.) wrote that “The canon and the church are correlative concepts. The canon establishes discrete writings from the past as Scripture. Without the church there is no canon; without the canon there is no Scripture in the proper sense. As the church stands under the norm of Scripture in every age—so do these writings find their realization as Scripture by being so read by a community, age after age, as the measure of its life and meaning.” But Johnson also asserts in item 7 on the same page that once the canon and the church are both established, the canon gains the upper hand in that correlative relationship: “within this community, the critical questions that readers pose to the texts are far less significant than the critical questions the texts pose to the readers.” Bonhoeffer 1963, as cited in Fant 1975, 42, asserts that “the question as to what came first, the Word or the church, is meaningless, because the Word as inspired by the Spirit exists only when men hear it, so that the church makes the Word just as the Word makes the church into the church. The Bible is the Word only in the church, that is, in the *sanctorum communio*.” Bultmann 1958, 71, wrote, “...to hear the Scriptures as the Word of God means to hear them as a word which is addressed to me, as *kerygma*, as a proclamation... The fact that the word of the Scriptures is God’s Word cannot be demonstrated

objectively; it is an event which happens here and now” (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 23]). On a parallel question, which came first—faith or community, Buttrick 1992, 5, recommends a simultaneous approach: church and gospel both started to come alive at the resurrection.

[¶52] **Literary criticism has long noted the communal context of Gospel writing. Canonical criticism notes the function of believing communities all along the way of textual development and transmission.**

I picture canonical criticism as a kind of late-in-life offspring of redaction criticism and literary criticism. But this *child*, midwifed by *Childs*, was not as devoutly longed for as Hannah and Elkanah’s Samuel or Abraham and Sarah’s Isaac, and is surely not as deeply appreciated as were those offspring. But Wilson 1996, 144, gives a much more perceptive and positive assessment of the contribution of Childs’ canonical criticism program to restoring the function of faith in the work of biblical theology and scripture interpretation. And the focus on the “activity of the final redactor” gets some appreciation from the perspective of literary criticism as indicated by the discussion of Alter 1981, 19-20, citing a journal article by Joel Rosenberg. Johnson 1999, 157, in the introduction to his discussion of the Synoptic Gospels, has a statement, which I alluded to above [¶ 46], that captures the necessity of using historical source analysis along with a canonical (received text of the whole Bible) approach:

My approach is closer to that of literary criticism (than to historical source analysis), and the analysis is based on the final form of the text. But the awareness that this final stage of composition resulted from a complex oral and written process makes us sensitive to the peculiar density of these texts, as well as more appreciative of the simplicity and coherence of their finished condition.

James Sanders’ description of the work of canonical criticism suggests more interest in tracing the history of the developing written tradition than simply the awareness of a complex oral and written process:

Canonical criticism traces the history of the function of those authoritative traditions which ended up in one of the canons. In order to do so it uses all the valid and pertinent tools of biblical criticism, especially tradition criticism, but focuses on the believing communities at every stage along the way rather than only on the individual discreet geniuses, such as original thinkers, editors, redactors, and the like, whose hands may be evident in the process.

Here, I note that attention to the communal context of the writing of the books of the Bible is not new or unique to the program of canonical criticism as James Sanders describes it. Krister Stendahl's *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of The Old Testament* (1954, 1967, 1968) and Howard Clark Kee's *Community of The New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (1977) are two examples of earlier attention to the communal context of the earliest source documents of the New Testament writings. But attention to the believing communities *at every stage along the way* of the developing written traditions is a distinguishing feature of canonical criticism as Sanders describes it. The perspectives of canonical criticism are obviously at work in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* by Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders 1993 where it becomes more clear to me that access to the function of believing communities all along the way of textual transmission and redaction comes by way of hard work in comparative midrash and the notion of intertextuality. Brueggemann 2005, has a refreshing approach that signals a creative balance between the perspectives of canonical criticism and traditional discussions of authority, sources, and textual development, in three essays that have been conveniently republished as the first three chapters of *The Book That Breathes New Life*. His assessment of the work of Childs, 109-112, is candid, fair-minded and helpful. Brueggemann, 3-10, presents the authority of the Bible in terms of its power to authorize communities to live and act in certain ways rather than in terms of authorship or ecclesiastically sanctioned canons. Brueggemann 2003 exemplified his balanced approach between critical discussion of textual sources and development and a canonical discussion of the intention of the final form of the text, as he discussed each book

of the Christian Old Testament. Wilson 1996, 144-145, gives a concise assessment of Brueggemann's theological approach to the transition from what the text meant to what the text means, especially for Christian preaching.

[¶53] **Recent homiletic theology imagines a kind of expository preaching that continues the canonical process that, rather than merely explaining what the text meant at the time it became fixed and then choosing some way to apply the ancient meaning of the text to the present situation, recasts and repurposes the text for the present situation by way of imaginative remembering.**

Recent (the two decades immediately preceding and the two decades immediately following the turn of the twenty-first century) homiletic writings by Buttrick, Carl, Childers, Craddock, Forbes, Jensen, Killinger, Lischer, Long, Lowry, Massey, Mitchell, Niedenthal, Rice, Steimle, Barbara Brown Taylor, Gardner C. Taylor, Troeger, Don M. Wardlaw, Theodore Wardlaw, Wenig, Wilson, and others seem to indicate that our preaching and teaching in the church should continue the activity of the scriptural writers, editors/redactors, and canonizers using the process that Brueggemann 2003, 8, calls imaginative remembering. This does not mean that we preachers should propose official changes to the canon. But it means that rather than merely explain what the biblical text meant in the original setting and what it might mean in the present context, we should retell the stories and recast the texts for the situations of now. Wenig 2001, 193-4, discusses the midrashic practice of interpretation by way of expanding biblical stories by creating possible alternative plot lines or narrative developments using the names of characters in the biblical material (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 9]). Long 1989, 35-36, citing Paul Ricoeur 1981, summarizes one of the observations of modern literary criticism and hermeneutical theory thus: "Oral communication...grows out of a concrete situation and possesses meaning in relation to its setting... Written communication, on the other hand, because it is fixed in writing transcends the

circumstances surrounding its creation... Unlike the spoken word, a written text is sent hurtling through time and space and is free to interact with ever new and different situations.” Ricoeur 1995, 71, discusses the function of preaching to convert the written communication of scripture back to the oral communication in which it is rooted. On the other hand, he also, 218-221, discusses the inherent “textuality” of biblical faith. This, it seems to me, raises the question of whether Childs’ strict focus on the canonical form of the biblical texts to the exclusion of their sources and historical development may also tend to freeze the meaning of the text at the time and situation when the canonical form became fixed, thus limiting exposition to explanation. Perhaps this constriction of preaching to the exegetical task of merely explaining the meaning of the text at the time it became canonically fixed can be alleviated by remembering Childs’ insistence that the Bible should be taken as a witness to the faith of the church at the time of its being written (redacted) in the received form rather than as a record of what happened. And it could be further alleviated if one uses canonical criticism broadly as illustrated in James Sanders 1984, Evans and Sanders 1993, and Brueggemann 2003. I have discussed related matters in Chapter IV, “Proclamation – Homiletic Theology II: Expository Preaching In Christian Worship: Reclaiming Its Importance, Getting Better At It.” If we preachers are to engage in this imaginative remembering that simulates the redaction and canonization process, should we only do so with reference to a very limited selection of texts in the Bible or should we open a way to address this process to any and all passages in the body of canonical scripture? *The Open Bible Lectionary* points to the second course.

[¶54] I have discussed above, in Chapter I, other matters related to canon, including the idea of lectionaries as inner canons.

CHAPTER III

Proclamation—Homiletic Theology I:

Notes and Comments on Various Approaches to the Development and Structuring of Sermons

[¶1] **The history of Christian preaching is marked by several major swings between preaching expository sermons from sections of the Bible taken in continuous series and preaching that uses selected texts of the Bible in seasonal lectionaries to expound on the theological themes of the feast days and seasons that celebrate major events and teachings in the church's memory of the life and work of Jesus as the Christ as recorded in the New Testament writings.**

The Roman *Lectionary for Mass* 1970, which is the English version of *Ordo Lectionum Missae* 1969, and the derivative *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992 have been enormously successful in their intention to encompass a great deal more of Scripture than their immediate predecessor lectionaries did and also to restore the essential place of scripture exposition in homiletics. Yet both the *Lectionary for Mass* and *The Revised Common Lectionary* inevitably cause preachers to tend toward more emphasis on the festal calendar and the liturgical theology by which readings were originally selected and organized and therefore less emphasis on scripture exposition in its own right, as has ever been the case whenever liturgies and festal calendars have grown more complicated, elaborate, and fixed. That history and tendency have been discussed, mentioned, or alluded to by Nocent 1977, *Vol. 1*, 97-8; Lowry 1992, 15-26; Bonneau 1998, 141-2; Old 1998b, 165; Old 2010, 301-306; and Sloyan 2000, 30. Old 1998b, 403, notes that with the preaching of Pope Leo the Great (400-461) the festal sermon, as distinguished from scripture exposition, had become the chief sermon genre, a pivotal development in the history of Christian worship. That,

according to Fant and Pinson 1995, I, 36, was a major departure from the *lectio continua de scriptura* verse by verse scripture commentary sermons of the “simple homily” that was modeled by the early church teacher and preacher Origen (185-254). There was, of course, a significant effort to amend this trend in the Reformation, according to Old 2002 (vol. 4), 16, when Luther sees the Christian feasts of the calendar and their lectionary as opportunities to preach on the basic teachings of the biblical faith regarding grace and salvation, not just a time to highlight the festivities. On a similar note, Old 2007 (vol. 6), 397-399, observes that some 19th century Church of England preachers such as Henry Liddon (1829-1890) used the lectionary as an aid in counterbalancing the influence of the new historical-critical approach to the Bible by supporting a more traditional or orthodox interpretation of the lectionary readings in terms of the basic teachings of incarnation around Christmas, redemption around Easter, and the gift of the Holy Spirit around Pentecost. And, on the *lectio continua de scriptura* side, Old 2002 (vol. 4), 3, notes that Calvin, the supreme exegete of the Reformation, worked his way through the bulk of Holy Scripture, setting a high standard for expository preaching. On the other hand, Old 2002 (vol. 4), 56, notes that the Reformer Oecampadius clove to the medieval tradition of preaching the Gospel lesson of the day but was guided mainly by the subject matter of the feast. However, he transitioned to the *lectio continua de scriptura* approach following the Reformation Act of 1529 and his installation as chief preacher in the cathedral at Basel, per Old 2002 (vol. 4), 63, which I also reference in Book II, n. 9 [¶ 2].

[¶2] **The interpretation of scripture and the development of sermons using the three-year lectionaries are influenced by the liturgical traditions involved in the development of the lectionaries and by the varied liturgical and homiletic traditions of the churches and preachers that use the lectionaries.**

Old 2002 (vol. 4), 200, notes that the persistent tendency of Roman Catholic preachers to dwell on the meaning of the feast, season, or day rather than the meaning of the text, is illustrated specifically in the preaching of Robert Bellarmine (1522-1620). Old 2004 (vol. 5), 368, indicates that the historic Eastern Orthodox lectionaries were more organized toward the reading of much scripture in *lectio continua* chunks and were less limited or controlled by the festal calendar than the Roman Catholic lectionaries. West 1997 is all about the hermeneutical trajectories of the three-year lectionaries, based respectively on a “Catholic liturgical paradigm,” the heart of Christian worship seen as the presentation of the paschal mystery in the Eucharist, and a “Protestant liturgical paradigm,” the framework of Christian worship seen as the rehearsal or recital of salvation history as a setting for the proclamation of the culmination of that history in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. West discussed how these two different perspectives may lead to different approaches to preaching while the nominal elements or actions of a Sunday morning worship service may be essentially the same in the Catholic paradigm and the Protestant paradigm. Ronald Allen 1998, 29, along with other writers, describes a basic outline of the elements of a Christian worship service produced by the liturgical renewal movement triggered by the Second Vatican Council, 1963-1965, an outline or order of worship that can be seen through the lens of West’s “Protestant paradigm” or his “Catholic paradigm.” West 1997, 183-184, discusses the need and possibilities for balance in preaching between using scripture in the service of the church’s memory by which the lectionaries are shaped and respecting the freedom of the scriptures to “speak in their own right.” This tension is an example of the perennial complaint of scripture scholars against the tendency of clergy and professors to protect the scriptures with the scaffolding of dogma, tradition, liturgics, ecclesiastical machinery, and claims of authority; so writes Craddock 2002, 50, citing Kierkegaard. N. T. Wright 1992, 4-

6, finds that the challenge and opportunity of reading the scriptural *story* as it is has been complicated and even blocked by the extremes and tunnel vision of the higher criticism as well as by the biases and prejudgments of both liturgical piety and fundamentalist piety. Horace T. Allen 1996, 16, is only half correct when he argues that it is the scriptures and their preaching that shape the calendar rather than the calendar that shapes the preaching. It is clearly a case of both/and, not either/or. Ronald Allen 1998, 30, discusses positive features of worship and preaching that are planned around the theological themes of the liturgical calendar, the appointed scripture text, and the situation and needs in church and world; but he also cautions about the boredom that can beset the congregation when the calendar/thematic approach to worship and preaching is handled carelessly, say by going to the archive of previous calendar cycles for liturgical prayers and musical selections and sermons that refuse to be resuscitated into new life. There is more on the two paradigms further along in this Chapter.

[¶3] **There is a paradox in the turn from preaching on topical life situations to preaching from a lectionary text, namely: a tendency toward analyzing the language of the text in its original context and life situation while failing to address its meaning or intention to any serious issue or need in church and world today.**

Buttrick 1987, 232, expressed reservations about always preaching from a text and being bound by a lectionary, and in 1994b, 5-12, asserts that preaching has become “a captive voice” by, among various fads, fashions, and cultural accretions in homiletic method, a too narrow focus on Scripture exposition, inadvertently prompted by the biblical theology movement, including Karl Barth’s Word of God theology, and by the liturgical renewal movement (that began with unity and comity agreements among the global mission associations and agencies of Europe and North America in the late 19th century — example: let the Anglican missionaries evangelize northern

India and the Presbyterian missionaries evangelize southern India — and continued in waves throughout the 20th century) along with the twentieth century ecumenical movement (which also stems in part from those interdenominational dialogues among global mission agencies) and by the explosion of lectionary based preaching following Protestant adaptations of the *Lectionary for Mass* produced pursuant to the Vatican II Ecumenical Council of 1962-1965. Similarly, Lowry 1997, 41-42, suggests that during the last two decades of the 20th century the widespread use of the common lectionary and the all-too-quick utilization of expert commentaries prior to the lectionary appointed text itself getting hold of the preacher have produced sermons that are more “biblical,” more boring, and less evocative (citing Gene Tucker), possibly drawing attention away from the text and its context, which of course is not our context. That is, close attention to the grammar of a text is no guarantee of insight into the intention of the text in its own historical setting and thus no guarantee of discovering any connection with the present situation. Buttrick 1994, 9, cites a minister who when asked why he had not addressed the moral issues involved in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, “a war that by anyone’s reading of the Christian ‘just war’ tradition must be labeled as suspect,” replied “We follow the lectionary here.” But the larger case that Buttrick makes indicates that the pattern of using expository preaching in supposed faithfulness to Barthianism and the biblical theology movement long predated the great spread of lectionary-based preaching with the three-year lectionaries. Massey 1974, 45, was not writing about trends such as Barthianism, the biblical theology movement or the three-year lectionaries but about “a responsible self” when he reviewed the rationalizations that many churchmen used for avoiding current moral and social issues in their preaching and when he pointed out that “All along, however, the Black preacher has been insisting that the secular aspects of life are moral at their center and that the concern for human rights and decent treatment is no side-issue but an

understood implication of the biblical anthropology that declares every man as made ‘in the image of God’” (also cited below [¶ 44]). Buttrick 1988, 14, warns of a new kind of biblicism, albeit it a safe “Barthian biblicism,” that can hold preachers in thrall and distort the gospel just as surely as old-fashioned Bible thumping. (I discuss variant usages of the terms biblicist and biblicism in Chapter I [¶ 16]). To understand why Buttrick would cast such an aspersion on the renown Barth see Buttrick’s Foreword in Barth 1991, 9-11, where he faults Barth’s insistence that the sermon be no more than a reiteration of the text and his extreme aversion to the efforts of preachers to make their sermons relevant to current world affairs and human needs in topical sermon introductions, illustrations, and conclusions. Yet Buttrick acknowledges in a note that Barth “does not begin his definition of preaching with mention of the Bible. In the definition, scripture shows up in a subordinate clause and is discussed after Barth has defined several other criteria, for example, revelation, church and ministry.” Further, I find it hard to square Buttrick’s charge of uncompromising biblicism (if that means something like bibliolatry) with Barth’s 1991, 78, assertion that “The Bible is not God’s Word in the sense of a state code...” “In reality we ought to say that the Bible *becomes* God’s Word” in the event when we come to the Bible with a life history of living and working with the Bible in expectation that God will speak to us there. Sounds like good theology rather than biblicism. And when Barth asserts, 103, that “what is present in the biblical text...is not revelation itself, but witness to God’s revelation” in Jesus Christ, it is hard to think that he is some kind of a Bible worshiper. Barth himself, 106, cautions against “the danger of an arbitrary biblicism” into which preachers might stumble when they forget that their preaching takes place in the context of the theological tradition of a particular church at a particular time.

[¶4] **There are some similarities between the sermons produced through**

exegetical study that leads to some sort of bridging device from the historical context of the text to the present context of preacher and hearers and sermons produced by the untutored preacher's narration of his or her personal response to the text as it is.

The modern, that is, since the advent of the historical critical study of the Bible, practice of using the bridge paradigm (Farley 1996) in preaching requires that the preacher begin by acknowledging the gap in the cultural and cosmological context of the scripture text and the cultural and cosmological context of the preacher and hearers. And then, after specifying the dimensions of the gap for the text at hand, the remainder of the sermon is devoted to renovating an old language bridge with fresh expression or designing and building a new language bridge especially made for the specific elements of the gap that separates the life situation of the text from the life situation of the congregation. The project of the new homiletics may be characterized, in some respects, as discerning the intention of the text for its original audience in their cultural and cosmological setting, translating that into a similar intention for the present audience in our cultural and cosmological context, and then presenting that translation in preaching without taking time to point out the gaps and spelling out the steps taken to bridge them. Thus, whether the bridge-building tools that one uses in sermon preparation include demythologization, phenomenological analysis, structural semiotics, catalytic reading, narrative theology, modern/postmodern hermeneutics, exegesis followed by application, philosophy and textual interpretation as language analysis¹ – or whether one uses ancient interpretation and preaching devices such as typology, allegorization and spiritualization: one does not take time in the sermon to illuminate and spell out the gaps or to identify the bridging tools that one has used in sermon preparation and development. And whether we are holding steady-as-she-goes in an older conventional

homiletics or exploring various options in the so-called new homiletics, many of us might look askance at the untutored preacher who skips exegetical work altogether and simply bears witness to what the text means to him in his spiritual walk with Jesus. He is surely in some danger of preaching a sermon that intends something quite contrary to what the text intended for its original audience, we think. Yet, some critically untutored preachers have made a powerful and positive impact on people and societies in Christian history. Fant and Pinson 1995 VI, 281-292, give account of the contributions of Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), and note that he preached on the goodness and love of God and not so much on repentance and the threat of hell, and that his preaching was essentially personal testimony of the work of “Christ in his own life and in those whom he encountered, with lots of stories – mostly stories.” And the new homiletics proposes that we learn to do something similar to the untutored preacher’s personal testimony but only after the navigational corrections entailed in careful exegetical study. Consider the title of Long 2005: *The Witness of Preaching*.

[¶5] **It is important for all Christians to continue growing in our habits and skills of Bible reading and Bible study individually and in groups. We should also grow in the habit and skill of interpersonal witness and sharing of our faith experience and daily walking with Christ, yet without burdening our talk with technical or historical reservations and disclaimers.**

The parameters of preaching as faith witness rather than Bible lecture should not be used as a rationale for watering down or dismissing the pastoral and pedagogical work of helping all people in our Christian communities to become students of the Bible and discussants of scripture interpretation. Bible reading and Bible study by all Christians is a key ingredient of the life and ministry of Christ’s church. When Christians gather in Bible short courses, Sunday School classes or Bible study groups, and when we read the Bible devotionally in families and

individually, we cannot ignore the gaps between our cultural and cosmological context and that of the Bible, but we are invited and challenged to know the gaps and to use some of the various technical and philosophical and theological and communal tools that are available to deal with them in order to discern what God may be saying to us and to our communities and to the world in the here and now. On the other hand, it seems to me that the new homiletics practice of keeping technical exegetical and hermeneutical and theological discussion to a minimum in sermons also has usefulness in our conversation and walk with fellow Christians in fellowship settings and shared ministry and cooperative mission in church and world. For example, I have served for many years on a prison ministry team that includes both teammates and inmates who consistently speak as though completely oblivious to the cultural and cosmological gaps between the world of the Bible and the modern/postmodern world, yet are quite practical and loving and spiritually focused in discerning the message that God has for their own life and situation. Sometimes their literalism and facticity can cause them to overlook or bypass what I consider to be the most important message or intention of the text. But I have no qualms about adding my own discernment to theirs without presenting my perspective as a subtraction from or a contradiction of theirs. In fact, I find it most practical and edifying for my own piety (sense of God in my life and world) and for the shalom of Christian fellowship to converse about the biblical symbols as if the particular words and actions happened just as reported. I see no lack of integrity here. This is what Borg 2001, 50-51, calls postcritical naïveté, an adaptation that does not happen inevitably after one has moved from the precritical naïveté of childhood and youth into mature critical thinking. Rather, one must decide to embrace a postcritical naïveté for the sake of one's own piety or experience of God through the Bible and Christian community and common ministry and mission. That is, one must embrace a kind of knowing naïveté in order to

make ordinary conversation a reality within one's own family, faith community, acquaintance circle, and among fellow team members in ecumenical mission and ministry. How functional would our faith and walk and fellowship and mission and ministry be if we always had to insert conditional provisos in our conversation, such as "whether this really happened" or "according to Matthew's testimony?" On the other hand, Borg 2001, 50, 2003, 51, reports that just such a disclaimer or preface is used by Native American storytellers when telling their tribe's story of creation (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 7, ¶ 30]). For a particular example, and not just with regard to creation stories, I was favorably impressed by the gentle use of such provisos in the testimony of Black Elk (1863 - 1950), an Oglala Sioux holy man, in Neihardt 1995, 5, "This they tell, and whether it happened so or not I do not know; but if you think about it, you can see that it is true" and, 66, "Watanye said the story happened just as he told it. If it did not, it could have, just as well as not. I will tell that story now." It seems that Black Elk, who could not read and had no knowledge of the larger world of *recorded* history, 37, n. 6, had a much better grasp of the indeterminacy of all historical memory, and the symbolic character of all language and what it means to perceive or discern spiritual truth in stories that are well-told and which are always parabolic than do many of us Christian believers who are creatures of the modern age yet still living in the age of postmodernism which has re-embraced some of the wisdom of the pre-modern ages. If the words we share in our conversation with fellow prison ministry team members and with prison inmates could be critiqued as somewhat of a theological muddle, that does not detract from the fact that our shared words are part and parcel of our sharing in the bond of love and peace that we have in Jesus Christ. And sometimes I find it best and most loving for me to use this same approach in the small group Sunday School class that I attend, even though, in that setting, there are occasions when I feel justified in pointing out a factual discrepancy that

has been overlooked or a statement that contains its own contradiction, or when I can be helpful by pointing out some of the tools that could be used in our task of understanding the gaps and in discerning what intention in the text can best be translated into a relevant intention for our own time and situation.

[¶6] **The newer hermeneutics and homiletics along with postmodernist philosophy's turn to experience and the Christian tradition of personal faith witness and testimony can be useful in providing practical wisdom for navigating with kindness and compassion the sometimes tense climate of encounter and social interaction with people of rigid ideological opinions and outlooks and people who bear the attitudinal scars of previous intellectual shocks and conflicts.**

A situation in which I find that it is useful, responsible and loving to follow the practice of the new homiletics of keeping technical, exegetical, hermeneutic, philosophical and theological language and discussion to a minimum is when I encounter someone who is a convinced skeptic or someone who has been turned away from Christian faith and fellowship, perhaps by an encounter with modern critical Bible interpretation even though they are completely enmeshed in a modern scientific view of the world in professional and public and private life; or perhaps I encounter someone who has been repulsed by the presence of literalist or fundamentalist or progressive or liberal people and teachings in the church, or perhaps by some unpleasant or abusive personal experience in the church. Unfortunately, as Borg 2003, 194-195, makes clear, our churches have been negligent in that while both our children and our adults may be well acculturated in the modern/postmodern age of science and technical studies and perhaps even a historical study of art and general literature, they may not deeply encounter the ramifications of this worldview for the interpretation of biblical texts until they come to a university course in Bible or religious philosophy and history or even a first semester Bible course in seminary. It is

usually not productive to engage such people in logical disputation, although sometimes it might be useful to take a genuine interest in their thinking and invite them to talk more about where they are coming from intellectually and the spiritual path that they have traveled. But I have found that more often than not I can be most useful and loving by simply sharing with that person something of how the Christian faith and fellowship continue to hold great meaning in my life and perhaps mention my conviction that I am able to hold to the Christian faith and fellowship without violating my intellectual integrity with regard to recognizing and accepting a modern scientific view of the world and of history. This might or might not open a door to further discussion in the present or a future moment. But at least it does not lead to a fruitless dispute over technicalities. According to Fant and Pinson 1995, II, 214, the Puritan preacher and liturgiologist Richard Baxter (1615-1691) took as the motto of his life the words he discovered in a Latin treatise of Rupertus Maldenius, an obscure German writer and conciliatory theologian of the seventeenth century: “*In necessary things unity, in unnecessary things liberty, in all things charity.*” One could do much worse than live by that guide, and I sometimes do much worse. Consider also Lischer’s 2001, 68, discussion referenced above of the contemporary preacher’s inherited internal split as a creature of the modern/postmodern age and a child of a faith community, facing one’s own ambivalence, accessing the self-transcendence and integration available in Christ by the gift of the Spirit, and 73-75, utilizing the resources available for maintaining that integrating spiritual center. One of those resources is, of course, the Scriptures when read daily and devotionally apart from the work of exegeting a passage in sermon preparation. Lischer, 74, wrote “Before anyone can preach a biblical sermon, that person must have encountered Christ through the Bible.”

exegesis and biblical exposition and the consequent distortion of preaching are readily available in the newer hermeneutics and a newer homiletics.

Buttrick 1994 has pointed out that a great deal of lectionary/expository preaching has tended to avoid dealing with some important social issues of the times. But as someone else has pointed out “it need not be so.” The assumption that the faithful proclamation of the gospel must address current issues and needs in God’s world cannot be assailed with integrity. And not only that but as Fant and Pinson 1995, I, v, discovered while selecting sermons from the first twenty centuries of Christian preaching for inclusion in their thirteen-volume work, “the preachers who made the greatest impact upon the world...spoke to the issues and needs of their day.” Ronald Allen 1996, 179, 185, notes that the deficiencies that Buttrick has observed in some lectionary preachers are not inherent with the textual or lectionary system. And, as Deiss 1992, 42, points out, the Vatican II purpose of transforming the heavy ecclesial institution into a biblical church does not intend a church of biblicists whose principal concern would be exegesis, but a church rooted in the word, this purpose to be promoted through enhanced reading of scripture and preaching of the gospel at Sunday worship. The reader/preacher is hereby warned and advised to take counter measures against creeping biblicism by continually reading and observing as widely and deeply as possible in the affairs of church and world. Wilson 1996, 138, responds to Buttrick’s alarm about the narrow exegetical focus of some lectionary based “expository” preachers with a review and discussion, referencing Schleiermacher’s *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, of the current fragmentation or separation of the classical four departments in the seminaries, “Bible, systematic theology, history, and practical or pastoral theology,” noting that: “Historically their meeting was in preaching, which theological education and the university itself initially existed to serve.” Thus he points to a need to recover “Interdisciplinary Attitudes” in the field of

preaching. And Wilson 2007, 99-105, explains why preaching the gospel of Christ from the whole Bible requires addressing current social issues and he provides guides for being theologically oriented in dealing with public issues in such a way as to avoid coming across as a preacher who plays at politics. Buttrick's great work, *Homiletic* 1987, provides excellent guidance for preaching that strikes the most responsible balance between traditional expository or biblical preaching that neglects to "name God in the world" and traditional topical preaching that neglects the Bible or only uses the scriptures as a touchstone or springboard for discussion of a theme, a topic, a subject, or a situation. Buttrick's hybrid between textual and topical preaching is what I strive for in doing what I refer to as biblical expository preaching whether following a calendar lectionary or a continuous biblical lectionary.

[¶8] **Here is a counterpoint to Buttrick's example of minority reports of preachers using lectionary festal/expository preaching as an excuse for failing to address their preaching to contemporary ethical issues in public policy and societal practices: preaching from a schedule of assigned texts is more likely than independent selection of preaching texts to give the preacher a challenge and an opportunity to address an issue that she might otherwise tend to avoid.**

The fact that Buttrick 1994 has noticed many preachers using the lectionary approach to do a kind of "biblical" – or "biblicist" – preaching that actually avoids addressing the gospel to the present world as it is can hardly be blamed on the lectionary or on the practice of preaching from a Scripture passage. Charles Rice 1980, 55 ff., indicates that a major reason for the relative silence or ineffectiveness of the pulpit in addressing the pressing issues of the day is the fact that preachers know very well the stories by which people, including ourselves, are actually living and how many polarities or tensions may be stirred up by addressing the gospel story to "The Story of our Times." Old 1998b, 202-203, notes that John Chrysostom's sermons on Colossians when he

was spiritual patriarch of the empire at Constantinople show us his courageously laid out social hermeneutic and demonstrate just how prophetic expository preaching can be. I have a reference on the nickname Chrysostom for John of Antioch in Book II, n. 4 [¶ 3]. And Old avers, 209, that the expository preaching of Chrysostom, “the patron saint of preachers,” was just as prophetic as the preaching of Amos, Micah, and Jeremiah; and that “John Chrysostom’s invective was no less sharp or less timely than Isaiah’s oracles against the house of Judah.” And Old 2007, 74-79, demonstrates that Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), “the father of modern preaching and modern theology,” whether preaching from a text he chose for a major Christian feast day (he did not follow a calendar lectionary week to week) or preaching a text in a continuous series, ordinarily made preaching social and moral concerns go hand in hand with scripture exposition. My own experience is quite the opposite of the avoidance that Buttrick has observed: preaching from an assigned text, whether continuous or calendar, gives me a challenge and an opportunity to address current controversial issues that I might otherwise postpone indefinitely. One of the advantages of expository preaching when presented in a continuous series through a book of the Bible, cited by Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 142, from Alexander’s 1864 *Thoughts on Preaching* is “(e) It gives occasion for remarking on many passages of the Bible which otherwise might never enter into one’s sermons, and for giving important practical hints and admonitions which might seem to some hearers offensively personal if introduced into a topical discussion, but which are here naturally suggested by the passage in hand.” Items (a) to (f) that are briefly summarized in Broadus correspond to items 1 to 5 and 7, pp. 229-253 in the 1975 Banner of Truth reprint of Alexander 1864. Item (e) is discussed at great length by Alexander 1864 and that exposition can be seen as Item 5 in the 1975 reprint, 240-242. Willimon 2005, 23, cites Augustine as hearing God calling him through the appointed Gospel text to address the people on the current

moral corruption of their city. I discuss the varieties of expository preaching in Chapter IV. Brueggemann 2003, 12-13, asserts that the only error which leads to biblicism of the old-fashioned kind is the error of imagining that the final interpretation of the Bible has been given, and he suggests ways to avoid that error.

[¶9] **Responsible scripture interpretation and responsible preaching and teaching in the church do not allow for an absolutist adherence to the lectionary selections.**

Preachers and worship planners should always be ready and alert to forsake any and all lectionaries in limit conditions that clearly require a situational selection of Scripture texts. Horace T. Allen 1996, 17, acknowledges “the human reality that a particular preacher might or might not feel able to deal with certain pericopes or combinations thereof, particularly in the context of civil, congregational, or personal happenings.” And he indicates that “At such moments a responsible pastor or preacher will want to exercise the freedom of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament to make other choices and certainly to edit the pericopes as given in the table.” Buttrick’s 1994 searching critique of how the Scriptures have come to be used and abused under the guise of lectionary based biblical exposition is, according to James Sanders’ 1972, xiv, definition, a form or aspect of midrash. If Buttrick, Sanders, and the lectionary developers and lectionary commentators were engaged in midrashic work, then so must every pastoral preacher be engaged in midrashic work. Clearly there is a real need for ongoing, sweeping, and penetrating midrashic review of the use and abuse of Scripture in preaching and worship, and also in religious education and personal and family devotions among the faithful people of both church and synagogue congregations. Sanders 1984, 26 ff., identifies *comparative midrash* as a new approach to the study of early Jewish interpretation of Scripture that began to emerge in the

1950's, and, 26-45, discusses some of the resulting observations and insights as to how the canonical process worked prior to the stabilization (aka closing) of the canon and how that process, continues to work after the stabilization of the canon and the continuing usefulness of comparative midrash in the interpretation of texts in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. I have further references to Sanders' discussion of the canonical process above in Chapter II.

Other dimensions of the meaning of midrash in the study of New Testament texts may be seen in Evans and Sanders 1993, 1-13, especially 10, on the definition of comparative midrash in relation to other methods of textual study. Park 2013, 4, notes that the word midrash derives from the Hebrew *derash* with the root meaning to dig, seek, study, or investigate, as in Ezra 7:10. Johnson 1999, 55, has it *darash*, to search, as does Sanders 1984, 26, with the connotation of "quest." Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 16, cite Gary Porton's more specific and narrow delineation of midrash: "a type of literature, oral or written, which stands in direct relationship to a fixed, canonical text, considered to be the authoritative and revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, and in which this canonical text is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to." That sounds a lot like what is generally meant by exegetical or expository teaching, writing, and preaching, doesn't it? Johnson 1999, 270, notes that the midrashic tradition in which Paul was trained was ordinarily a communal activity and that some of the midrashic sections in Paul's letters, e.g., Galatians 3-4, Romans 9-11, and Ephesians 2, may well be set pieces produced by Paul and his associates (also referenced in Chapter V [¶ 2]). That brings to mind some modern attempts at collegial study of lectionary texts by preachers in sermon preparation groups. I mention my own experience with such collegial groups in Chapter V [¶ 27, ¶ 28, ¶ 29]. Johnson, 334-337, also suggests that Paul's argument in Galatians 2:15 – 4:31 is an example of how the Pharisaic midrash can engage unabashedly in a kind of rationalistic logic that is tangled up with

technicalities of language as to tense and sequence and the definitions and relationships of faith and law and righteousness, a logic that is “beautiful” or “elegant” in the pure reason sense but which in some cases may be disconnected from experience or observable or documented reality. Such disembodied logic can also be seen in some of the arguments imputed to “Rabbi Jesus” in his controversies with “the Jews” (especially “the Pharisees”) as recorded in the Gospel of John; for example: John 5:31-38 and 8:12-20. Such passages may reflect a mixture of John’s Hebraic influence (midrash) and John’s Greek influence (rhetoric, gnosis). Johnson 1999, 463-464, discusses “The Argument of Hebrews” as “the longest sustained argument in the New Testament” and he notes that it is essentially the same argument as in Romans 5:12-21, and is a form of midrash “used widely in rabbinic tradition where it probably was borrowed from Greek rhetoric,” the argument “from lesser to greater,” or in the Hebrew language “from the light to the heavy.” Wenig 2001, 193-4, provides another perspective on the meaning of midrash: a broad approach to scripture interpretation that includes, for example, expanding biblical stories by creating other possible plot lines or narrative developments using the names of characters in the biblical material (also cited above in Chapter II [¶ 53]).

[¶10] **The major shift away from classical discursive rhetoric in the forms of scripture interpretation and preaching and toward a more narrative and inductive form was occasioned in large part by newer approaches to scripture interpretation in the biblical theology movement and Barth’s word of God theology and by a recognition of the narrative or time sequential quality of all speech and of life itself.**

Wenig’s observation about developing alternative plot lines of narrative material in midrashic interpretation brings to mind some of the approaches used in the recent rage of narrative preaching and what Kierkegaard 1954, 21-132—“A Panegyric Upon Abraham” (1983, 5-123, “Eulogy on Abraham”)—does with Abraham’s divinely ordered and divinely aborted offering of

Isaac as a sacrificial lamb. It also brings to mind the contemporary concept of canon as a communal process of adapting or resignifying texts according to new situations and needs, a concept espoused in the discipline known as canonical criticism, discussed more fully above in Chapter II. But, regarding the almost sacrifice of Isaac, James Sanders 1984, 55-57, mentions that story as an example of Israel's courage in monotheizing pagan stories that involve the gods' requirement of child sacrifice. Thus, because God provided a substitute for Isaac, rather than seeing the story as implicating the God of Israel in the primitive requirement of child sacrifice, the story may be seen as portraying the rejection of that rite by the Creator and King of the universe. Bonhoeffer 1958 has his own "midrash" on the episode of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah in which Abraham's experience portrays how one's life may go on as before after sacrificing every *thing* in the world, including the most precious gift of family ties, and being joined to Christ in a new creation, and yet nothing is the same, everything is changed. There are brief overview assessments of the narrative preaching wave of late 20th century in Edwards 2004, 811-815, and Old 2010, 30-31. Lowry 1997, 17-18, cites Thomas Long's 1993 interpretation of what happened in the history of Christian preaching to bring about the great shift that began in the last half of the 20th century:

Once upon a time, homiletics (the theological study of preaching) and rhetoric (the art of effective speaking) were a happily married couple. From Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* ... all the way to the big, systematic homiletical textbooks in vogue in the nineteenth century, Christian homiletics looked to the Bible and to theology for the *content* of sermons and then to the rules and fashions of classical rhetoric for the *form* and *style* of sermons.

And Lowry, following Long, allows as how that marriage of convenience was eventually undone at mid-20th century, in part by the Word of God theology of Karl Barth and the biblical theology movement propelled in large part by Old Testament scholars. Barth's Word of God theology was not amenable to extracting a theme from a scripture text and developing that as a sermon *scopus*

using principles of rhetoric. Barth taught that a sermon should simply follow the lines of the text but in the preacher's own words and voice. And the Old Testament scholars emphasized biblical narrative rather than biblical doctrines, noting that the verbal component of the Hebrew worship cultus consisted largely of rehearsing or reciting the saving deeds of the Lord in Israel's history. Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 109-141, 209-235, discuss the work of two preachers who are noted for their biographical sermons, Clarence Macartney, 1879-1954, and Clovis Chappell 1882-1972, telling the stories of biblical characters, an approach which may be thought of in some sense as a subcategory of narrative style in preaching even though using biblical and other reportage to create biographical narratives does not illuminate the narrative paths and intentions seen in the Bible. Massey 1980, 35-49, discusses the work of designing the narrative/story sermon by artfully weaving together the insights of the biblical theology perspectives stemming out of 20th century Old Testament studies, the narrative threads in the newer homiletics, and the elemental place of narrativity and storytelling in the Black preaching tradition. He also, 48, cites a sermon by Billy Graham on the parable of the prodigal son and the loving father as an example of a sermon that conforms to the narrative style and flow of a narrative scriptural text, which, it seems to me, necessarily adheres also to Barth's dictum that the sermon is to follow the lines of the text rather than be a dissertation on a theme extracted from the text or a scopus identified in or assigned to the text. Buttrick 1987, 9-13, discusses the elemental place and function of story and storytelling in human life and human language and the prevalence of naming and storytelling language in the Scriptures and in the history of Christian preaching; and, 285-303, he points out the inherent narrative character of all basic homiletic structures and strategies, because all involve plotting a sequence of telling. And, according to Lowry 1997, 55, the order of that sequence of telling is not indifferent but is always strategic just as the order in which musical notes are played is essential

to melody.

[¶11] **There are historical and cultural reasons why the communication of the Christian message has required both narrative and discursive approaches from the very beginning, whether in the preaching of the apostles, the earliest confessions (faith statements) of the community, the witness of the New Testament writers, or the speech communication of teachers and preachers throughout Christian history.**

Granting the narrative or sequential plotting character of all sermon structures, Buttrick 1987, 13-17, explains why Christian preaching must go beyond its acknowledged character and task of storytelling to embody the “symbolic-reflective” dimension of speaking *in Christ of Christ* (also referenced below [¶ 12]). This brings to mind Johnson’s 1999, 158, observations regarding the narrative form of the New Testament Gospels as contrasted with the more propositional form of the Gnostic writings:

The aging eyewitnesses and ministers of the word who shaped the story of Jesus for the ages to come...fixed the tradition not in the form of propositions but in the form of realistic narratives. These lifelike portrayals of Jesus dominate the NT canon and provide the sharpest contrast to the literary production of Gnosticism, which elevated the divine character of Jesus at the expense of his humanity. For the writers of the canonical Gospels, the story of the human being Jesus had continuing importance for the community that now confessed him as life-giving Spirit. The line from proclamation to the Gospel is extended through narrative.

Johnson, 160, credits Mark (1:1) with the seminal contribution of enlarging the word gospel to mean not only a message, the good news of salvation through the death and resurrection of the savior, as in the Epistles, but also a literary medium as well as a message, namely the medium of a narrative account of the life, death, and resurrection of the savior, as in the Gospels (referenced more fully below [¶ 12]; also cited above in Chapter I [¶ 27] and in Book II, n. 18 [¶ 2]). G. Ernest Wright 1952, 68, notes that the Gospels are not “mere memoirs or biographies. They represent a new literary form unknown in the pagan world: they are ‘gospels’, i.e., confessional (faith) recitals of historical events together with inferences derived from the events and seen as an

integral part of them” (quoted more fully below [¶ 12] and referenced in the Book II Introduction [¶ b. 2]). That contrast between the narrative form of the Gospels and the more discursive or propositional form of the Epistles is acknowledged somewhat offhandedly by Craddock 2011, 22, in his wry quip about resolving the controversy between C. H. Dodd and Rudolph Bultmann, as to whether the new Testament content is essentially story or essentially address calling for decision, by asserting a both/and rather than an either/or: we have the gospel as narrative in the Gospels and the gospel as address in the Epistles (also cited above in Chapter I [¶ 27] and below [¶ 17]). G Ernest Wright 1952, 59-86, in his chapter “What God Has Done,” draws on the observations of Cullmann 1949 about the form of the earliest Christian confessions found in the New Testament, including in the preaching of the apostles—summary statements of Jesus’ identity as the Christ—Lord and Son of God—based on accounts of God’s redemptive action in Jesus rather than on abstract formulations of doctrines or concepts; and drawing on the observations of Dodd 1937 about the form of the preaching of the apostles in the earliest church, prior to the writing of both the Epistles and the Gospels but evidenced in both, also recitals of what God had done in the historical events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection rather than abstract teachings or esoteric principles, in building his (Wright’s) case for biblical theology as recital. Cullmann, according to Wright’s reporting, indicates that the early confessions portrayed the significance of certain events that were seen by the early believers of Jewish background, and it was only later, after 150 C.E., that formulations such as Trinitarian teachings and Greek philosophical concepts such as the essence or substance of a divine/human being were needed in communicating the Christian message to pagans and Gentile Christians who were not familiar with the stories of God’s providential and chastening activities in the history of Israel but many of whom likely were familiar with abstract Greek philosophical thought and with Gnostic teachings in particular. And,

according to Dodd, the message in the preaching (*keryssein*) of the apostles, summarizing what God had done in the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection came to be known as the *kerygma* (proclamation). Key point: the main evidence of the earliest confessions of the Christian communities is found in the New Testament, as reported in Cullmann 1949, which includes the church's memory and reportage of what the apostles preached prior to the writing of the New Testaments.

[¶12] **The historical background events, experiences, and communal memories and documents out of which the Epistles and, later, the Gospels were written make it appropriate that the two groups of writings (Epistles and Gospels) should be read in a mutual relationship, with each group being used to help interpret the other, which is just what the three-year lectionaries are structured to facilitate, not only in seasons when the Epistle readings are selected as thematic cognates of the Gospel lections, but also in those seasons that have continuous Epistle sections as independent liturgical reading courses or as potential texts for semi-continuous expository sermon series on a segment of an Epistle.**

While the ordering of the Gospels and the Epistles in the Bible, along with the Gospel-dominant structure of the lectionaries, has created the mistaken popular perception that the Epistles were written as commentaries on the Gospels even though the Epistles predate the Gospels, it may be true to say that the Epistles were written as teaching or exhortation messages to help and guide and encourage the Christian communities in their journey and struggle of learning to live together according to the *kerygma* (proclamation) contained in the *keryssein* (preaching) that the apostles did before the writing of the New Testament but that for us is documented in the New Testament. Thus, it appears that in the earliest church the Christian message (*kerygma*—proclamation) was thought of just as much in the narrative terms of a recital of God's actions in the historical events of Jesus' life (including his own preaching as summarized in Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled,

and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news”) death, and resurrection as in the propositional terms of Paul’s gospel—*euangelion*: good news of salvation by grace through faith rather than by obedience in works of the law. Therefore, it was logical if not inevitable that the word gospel—*euangelion*—should, as Johnson 1999, 158-160, has it, be enlarged, as in Mark 1:1, to mean not only the propositional message of God’s grace or forgiveness, justification, and redemption in Christ, as in the Epistles, but also a narrative account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ, as in the Gospels (briefly referenced above [¶11]). Or, as G. Ernest Wright 1952, 68, wrote, citing Dodd 1937:

We cannot think of the Gospels as the raw material from which the preaching was constructed, because the actual situation is the other way around. The Gospels themselves represent the expansion of the *kerygma* from a number of sources of tradition. None of them (the Gospels), therefore, are mere memoirs or biographies. They represent a new literary form unknown in the pagan world; they are ‘gospels’, i.e. confessional recitals of historical events and traditions together with the inferences derived from the events and seen as an integral part of them. The New Testament Epistles, on the other hand, are not primarily *kerygma* (proclamation). They are addressed, not to pagans, but to Christians, and their concern is with the problems which Christians faced in a pagan world. ‘They have the character of what the early Church called “teaching” or “exhortation”. They presuppose the preaching. They expound and defend the implications of the Gospel rather than proclaim it’ (Dodd 1937, 9).

Thus, if it may be said that the Epistles were written to interpret the implications for faith and life—theology and ethics—of the narrative message (proclamation = *kerygma*) of what God had done in Jesus Christ, i.e., the content of the apostles’ preaching (*keryssein*), then it seems appropriate that the Epistles may also be used to interpret the later, much expanded, narrative accounts in the Gospels, and vice-versa, as implied and intended in the 3-year lectionaries. Such mutual interpretive use of the Gospels and Epistles favors the critiques, such as in Bonhoeffer 1958, 173-174, that it was always a mistake to separate our faith knowledge and experience of Jesus as the Christ between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of the Epistles, or the Jesus of

history and the Christ of faith. And, there is much to be learned from Borg's 1994, 1997, 1999, 2001, and 2003 alternative bifurcation of "the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus" which I mentioned in Chapter I above [¶ 9]. All of this would seem to substantiate Buttrick's argument, 1987, 13-17, which I cited above [¶ 11], as to why Christian preaching must go beyond its acknowledged character and task of storytelling to embody the "symbolic-reflective" dimensions of speaking *in Christ of Christ*.

[¶13] **Much of the great ferment and lively discussion among homiletic theologians during the late 20th and early 21st centuries has been around questions of how people in general and church people in particular listen to and hear and deal with and use the spoken words of preaching, and what sort of sermon speech actually communicates and may be most effective in doing to and for and with the hearers what it is intended to do.**

Johnston 1996, 4-13, references Craddock's inductive approach, Buttrick's communication studies and Lowry's references to general fiction and television police dramas and makes some constructive suggestions for rethinking and reformulating narrative theology and narrative homiletics in more theological and more ecclesial terms; for example, 13: "micro anthropology"—who listens? (the church)—rather than "macro anthropology"—how do all people listen? Johnston agrees that narrative forms in the Bible should be respected, but so should the non-narrative forms there. Lischer's 1996, 29, response to Johnston's article notes that the shift from how people in general listen to how people in the church listen still grants power to the audience to complete or reshape the message of God's redemptive love according to their particular situation and needs, and thus to have in some ways the same effect as Harry Emerson Fosdick's (1878-1969) much imitated and much maligned therapeutic or problem-solving model which Buttrick 1987, 405-426, discusses and specifically, 409, critiques Fosdick's "so-called

project method.” Fosdick’s kind of preaching is simply referred to as “topical” or “life-situation” by Charles F. Kemp, as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 17. But, according to Fant and Pinson, Fosdick was not content with preaching on the topical issues of the day but favored a person-centered, i.e., therapeutic or problem-solving, approach; and he disapproved of the then popular two-part sermon—first the historical explanation of the text and then the application to contemporary life. Similarly, Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 174-175, report on how Ralph Sockman makes a strong case in his homiletic writing for the greater communication and attention-holding effectiveness of life-situation preaching that is well grounded in scriptural and theological work as compared with approaches that begin with textual notes or doctrinal principles or that are rhetorically structured to begin with a proposition or thesis to be developed and demonstrated or proved.

[¶14] **There are various perspectives among homiletic theologians on the implications of Buttrick’s sermon structuring approaches in relation to traditional sermon types, sermon development starting places, and developmental procedures.**

A large part of Buttrick’s 1987 homiletic genius, it seems to me, is that he neutralizes the question of whether it is more effective to preach from a life situation or a scriptural passage or a theological teaching by presenting a homiletic structuring process, 305-317, that is applicable to any of the three moments or modes of consciousness that he identifies, 319-329, as corresponding, with some overlapping, with three starting places or bases for sermon development, 333-445: Preaching in the Mode of Immediacy, 333-363, is most applicable to preaching from narrative scripture texts; Preaching in the Reflective Mode, 365-404, is most applicable when preaching from a discursive scriptural text; and Preaching in the Mode of Praxis, 405-445, is most appropriate when preaching from a life situation. Wilson 2007, 144, shaded box,

seems to misrepresent Buttrick's intention by saying that Buttrick's mode of immediacy refers to narrative sermons (rather than preaching from narrative texts) and that Buttrick's reflective mode refers to propositional sermons (rather than preaching from discursive texts). Buttrick discusses his principles and tasks of homiletic structuring (general overview, 305-317, mentioned above) as applied specifically to each of these three modes and their corresponding sermon development starting places. The reader may be helped in clarifying these starting places for sermons (narrative texts, discursive texts, life situations) and the respective preaching modes (immediacy, reflection, praxis) by reading Lowry's 1997, 25-26, summary reflection as he chronicles Buttrick's phenomenological sermon perspective along with five other sermon types in, 20-28, "The Current Shape of the New Homiletic." Since the general structuring principles that Buttrick has adapted and applied to each type of preaching moment or sermon development starting place are based on studies in human consciousness and human communication there can be no going back to the two-part sermon: exegesis followed by gospel proclamation as life application (Ronald Allen 1998, 177-179; Keller 2015, 22, 41-42); or, according to Buttrick 1987, 319, the three-fold process: reading a text (exegesis), interpreting a text (exposition), and applying a text (applications—moral, spiritual, or churchly), or rhetorical schemes such as thesis/antithesis or proposition/demonstration (as in Wenig/Forbes 2001, 189-190). Borg 2001 and/or 2003 has observed somewhere in his discussion of a historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach to scripture interpretation that the pattern of a two-part homily consisting of a brief historical exposition followed by a contemporaneous story or parable, i.e., an extended metaphor, still prevails in the pulpits of some Anglican/Episcopalian and Roman Catholic parishes (also referenced below in Chapter IV [¶ 8, ¶ 11]). Massey 1980, 24-30, mentions communication science, worship context, community shaping, narrative mode, and message organization among

the concerns of the newer homiletics as the context or platform for launching his four chapters on designing the sermon under the headings of concepts, categories and sermon types familiar in an older or traditional homiletics, to wit: Chapter II. DESIGNING THE NARRATIVE/STORY SERMON, Chapter III. DESIGNING THE TEXTUAL/EXPOSITORY SERMON, Chapter IV. DESIGNING THE DOCTRINAL/TOPICAL SERMON, Chapter V. DESIGNING THE FUNERAL SERMON. That may not be inconsistent with Buttrick's application of his communication studies to three modes or preaching moments with each mode being more appropriate to a particular starting place for developing a sermon, whether that starting place be a discursive text, a narrative text, or a life situation. I recount below in Chapter V [¶ 32 and following ¶s] how I have used Buttrick's, 305-317, general structuring principles and tasks in conjunction with my previously established pattern of scouring the commentators, in developing sermons from appointed Gospel lections between Advent and Pentecost and in developing sermons from continuous and continuing series from Epistles in the summer and Old Testament books in the fall.

[¶15] **Homiletic theologians critique each other and build on each other's images and concepts in a mutual and gently contentious groping and grappling toward more luminous expressions of individual subjective faith experience that can be integrated with more objective communal and theologically sound expressions.**

Lischer 2001, 81-83, discusses "The 'Turn to the Subject,'" that is, to individual experience, as compared to the communal faith pattern of the New Testament churches, which turn he traces to the Enlightenment and of which he sees nineteenth century expressions in the psychological orientation of Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) and in revivalism in the likes of Charles Finney (1792-1875). However, it seems that Lischer 1996, in his response to Johnston 1996 cited above [¶ 13],

has read too much social psychology into Johnston's intended theological and ecclesial approach. But Lischer 2001, 16-29, provides a fuller expression of the function of story in the gospel and discusses possibilities and problems in narrative emphasis in preaching and homiletic teaching, a discussion from the perspective of "power to preach" in a resurrection faith that is *not* simply a subjective and individualistic sense of the living presence of a dead Lord, as in the hymn "I Serve a Risen Savior...He lives...You ask me how I know he lives: He lives within my heart," composed in 1933 by Alfred Henry Ackley (1887-1960), a familiar and well-loved hymn among many Christians, which has been excluded from some of the more highfalutin church hymnals. If that hymn celebrates a resurrection faith that fails to mention the communal aspect of the church as the resurrection body of Christ, the main sentiment is not inconsistent with the scriptural path of following Jesus to the cross and the resurrection life as experienced and maintained through the fellowship of his body the church, especially through the sacraments of his body, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and through learning and growing in his example and teachings through biblical study and discussion, and church teaching and preaching, as described in Bonhoeffer 1958, 180-191, "The Body of Christ," and, 192-198, "The Image of Christ," including, 197, "This is what we mean when we speak of Christ dwelling in our heart." And neither is the individual and subjective experience of serving "a living savior who is in the world today" inconsistent with Lischer's 2001, 80-81, definition of preaching as all the ways that the church talks to itself when gathered in worship and fellowship or when scattered in service and the life of "the world so loved by God," as part of the church's ongoing work of forming itself more and more in the likeness of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ, that is, a "community of contrast" among the communities of the world. Lischer 2001, 63-75, has a chapter headed "Christian Anthropology and the Possibility of Preaching" which I cited above in Chapter II [¶ 12]). And, 76-92, in his

final chapter, “Preaching as the Church’s Language,” he seems to be pointing in the same direction as Johnston’s mini-anthropology when he develops the concept of preaching as all the ways that the church talks to itself when gathered in worship and fellowship—songs, readings, prayers, sermons, sharing of mission and ministry notices—and where, 89-90, narrative appears not as stories meant to illustrate similarities between life in the Word and life in the world but rather as a continual recital of God’s Story—the church’s Story—that contributes to the formation and maintenance of the church as a contrast society, that is, living together in a way that points to what the life of the world could be under God’s lordship. Long 2004, 124-127, observes that while the personal faith stories that we tell in informal conversation—table talk—tend to be fragmentary and without complete form and direction, we know in faith as we are formed in worship that our story is part of God’s story which does have a proper destination and ending. Long 2005, 36-45, also sees the storyteller/poet image as a necessary but not sufficient perspective on the nature of the preacher’s task of bearing witness. He also, 132-134, discusses the insufficiency of Buttrick’s working hypotheses about how ideas are formed in human consciousness and about the form of sermons simulating sequential frames in a movie or slide show.

[¶16] **Examples of narrative style and inductive unfolding or discovery can be seen in the sermons of some famous preachers and some distinguished theologians.**

Scholes 1974, 16-17, citing Saussure, observes that the spoken sign, unlike the picture (and more so than the written word) is inherently narrative because it is unfolded in time—it is a line; the elements of a verbal utterance must be delivered in an order which is itself significant. Thus one experiences a speech or sermon event diachronically as one experiences the sequential flow of

time rather than synchronically as one might experience a painting or a sculpture or the printed page. Buttrick 1987, 285-303, mentions that aspect of the spoken word in pointing out the narrative character of all preaching, which I reference below in Chapter IV [¶ 58] and in Book II, n. 19 [¶ 3.2]. That narrative character inherent in the spoken word is also reflected in the title of Lowry 1985: *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching*, a book in which the author speaks directly, 74, to those of us who have been attracted to and tried his homiletic plot in sermon movement as well as Craddock's inductive/storytelling approach and have concluded that we are not story tellers or story collectors or fiction writers. According to Lowry, 7-8, 38, and passim, we may not be story tellers or story collectors, but our preaching unfolds willy-nilly in time rather than being a fixed object available all at once like a written text or a picture. Just as dialogic *style* in preaching does not necessarily require one to be involved in a sermon preparation and response group or, similarly, to engage the congregation in actual dialogue as part of the preaching moment, which I discuss below in Chapter IV, so narrative *style* in preaching does not require one to make up or find and tell stories in preaching. Rather, it requires that a sermon be organized or designed by sequence in time rather than by structure in place/space. Or, as Lowry 1997, 12, expresses it, when sermons develop more organically, like a tree, and less geometrically, like a house, "preaching is less an architectural science and more a horticultural art." Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 12, report a description of John Henry Newman's preaching by a contemporary, Lewis O. Brastow, that suggests a narrative flow: "And then there is the progressive movement of the thought. It is not closely articulated nor definitely outlined, but it moves rapidly onward to its goal." An example can be seen in Newman's sermon "Saul," 13-20, which displays a narrative movement with some interpretive teaching or explication interspersed in the telling and with two paragraphs of direct "lettuce" application in the form of a

let-us... style conclusion. Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 44, make a similar observation about the preaching of Charles Jefferson (1860-1937)—thematic with not much in the way of divisions or noticeable organization, yet the train of thought flows smoothly like a river, i.e., like a well-told story. In a different vein, Paul Sherer, as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 354, characterized the flow or form of Reinhold Niebuhr's sermons as "a sort of disciplined stream of consciousness, giving the impression that one is witnessing the very creative act itself, and he wrestles with his own thought, like some Jacob with an angel, protesting to it, as it tries to elude him in the shadows, lest the day should break." And Fant and Pinson sum up Sherer's estimation of Niebuhr's style: "The dialectical pattern remains much the same from sermon to sermon, whatever the particular divisions of the sermon might happen to be, but always without monotony. His various ideas are woven together into a web of relationships and implications, all relevant to his theme. Frequently Niebuhr turns from first one inadequate human explanation or solution to another, moving at last to his assertions." That description may not suggest a narrative or story-telling style but it does suggest an inductive rather than a deductive approach to solving a life-situation or scriptural interpretation problem or finding a satisfactory answer to a theological question. Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 150, see another example of an inductive approach in the televised sermons of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979) in which he began with material most acceptable to the viewers and proceeded only at the end of his sermon to those conclusions or pronouncements that might be less easily accepted by the audience, and they note that in this way "He demonstrated a superb ability to bridge the gap between the secular mind and Christian philosophy." In the same Volume XI, 268-272, Fant and Pinson 1995 provide a four-page transcription from an unpublished paper by James I. Packer including the parenthetical note, 268, "(every [Martyn] Lloyd-Jones sermon is a cumulative argument)," meaning that he lines up

observations from scripture and other sources and experience in a lively and spirited manner to make his case inductively. Thus, we may learn to attend to the narrative character of our preaching even if we never become story tellers or story collectors.

[¶17] **Homiletic theologians wrestle mightily, or at least persistently, to clarify the meaning of narrative form in texts and in sermon development and narrative style in writing and speaking. And preachers may struggle mightily in any attempt to change their predominant ways of sermon development, sermon structuring or sequence of telling and manner of speaking.**

Stokes 2001, 141, cites Lowry's 1997, 23, assertion that all sermons are narrative with plot twists but not all are spoken as storytelling. In fact, I judge that Lowry 1985, 55, uses a transitional phrase to make his exposition read stylistically like a story or a travelogue when in fact it is neither: "Before moving on to the next stage in this journey of plots..." This, it seems to me, highlights that a great deal of what Lowry is talking about is indeed a matter of style or syntax in speaking, a manner of expression rather than an actual genre of discourse. That is, it seems to me that he is not about telling stories or even telling a story or telling the Story, but, rather, he is, at least partly, about talking *as if* he were telling a story or recounting something that happened over a period of time. Of course, Lowry 1985 is about something more and bigger than simply a style of expression or a manner of speaking, as his discussion of plot, 52-58, makes clear. But style and manner of speaking are important, lest one fall into the error of weaving too much exposition into the story, becoming the kind of narrator who ruins his storytelling with a lot of explanatory asides. As to the complaint of preachers who claim to be neither genetically nor experientially equipped to be story writers or story tellers or story collectors, Ronald Allen 1998, 218, describes an exercise recommended in Craddock's *Storytelling Workshop* audio recording that includes questions designed to help preachers develop their own expressions of images, descriptions, and

narratives in response to situations mentioned in scripture passages. The difficulty that preachers encounter in the effort to change in their sermon preparation and preaching approach is illustrated in the report of Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 80-82, of how Joseph Fort Newton (1878-1950) anticipated by about 40 to 50 years the new homiletics of narrative, inductive, and dialogic approaches, including sermon preparation seminars and talk-back discussion groups in his writing *about* preaching but remained stuck in the classical rhetorical art of which he was a master in his own preaching. Alter 1981, 46, takes note of the importance and place of narrative imagination and playfulness in the writings of sacred history (also cited below in Chapter IV [¶ 63]). Steimle 1980, 170-171, discusses the narrative character of scripture and preaching, and he cites Wilder 1964, 64, on the narrative and plot character of all life. Lowry 1992, 74, 79-80, discusses narrative theology and the twentieth century shift in homiletic writing from classical rhetoric to narrative forms of sermons. N. T. Wright 1992, 38 ff. discusses the task of New Testament interpretation and the dynamics of stories, world view and knowledge. He, 79, rejects the conventional wisdom that the Apostle Paul forswore the Jewish story form used by Jesus and asserts that some of Paul's most abstract theological statements are actually expressions of the essentially Jewish story now redrawn in Jesus. Craddock 2011, 19-64, discusses "Preaching as Storytelling," including an acknowledgement that narrative structuring is not appropriate for preaching on all texts in all situations and he, incidentally, 22, "resolves" one of the big theological debates of the 20th century, between C. H. Dodd and Rudolph Bultmann, as to whether the gospel is essentially story (Dodd) or message calling for decision (Bultmann) by observing that the gospel is both story—the Gospels—and message calling for decision—Epistles of Paul and John (also referenced above in Chapter I [¶ 27] and in this chapter [¶ 1]). There was clearly an element of Craddock's wry humor in such a claim of resolution.

[¶18] **The advent of postmodernism in philosophy has opened or reopened a wider field of operation and intellectually recognized social functioning for theology along with challenges and opportunities of liberating and strengthening shifts in the shape and social functioning of religious communities and preaching.**

Allen and Springsted's 2007, 247-252. discussion of the much broader range of tasks given to Christian theology under the ethos of postmodernism than it was assigned by modernism is, perhaps, more to the point of *understanding* the Bultmann/Dodd debate than *resolving* it. They note, 247, that something of the moral philosophy dimension that attached to Christian theology prior to modernism is restored under the philosophical framework of postmodernism. Further, the postmodernist approach recognizes that, 248, "Christian faith is something which operates within moral space and that is misunderstood outside it" and that ancient texts such as the Bible are communal narratives, which leads to a shift in biblical theology away from its focus on the historicity of biblical events and a subsequent attempt to make them existentially relevant in the present moment. "Rather, when the texts are understood as the narrative of the community of Judaism and then Christians, their very nature has to be understood as texts written within a faith community and written in order to form the faith of the continuing community." I think an example of this understanding and use of religious texts as understood through eyes of faith and theology can be seen in Bonhoeffer 1975, 128, "with the introduction of the biblical word the text begins moving among the congregation" (also cited below [¶ 23, ¶ 74]). In a similar vein, Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 300, paraphrase Paul Sherer (1892-1969): "Preaching serves its proper function when it mediates the Word through which God enters the contemporary situation." This brings to mind the text "The word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12). This can be taken as a reminder that since texts are performative, living and active, the interpreter/preacher is not

completely in charge of what the text may be doing among the people, however she may structure her sermon. But Bonhoeffer was not writing about narrative approaches which Allen and Springsted, 248, introduce here: “One important example of newly defined task” of Christian theology and preaching “can be seen in the theological appropriation of the notion of narrative for articulating Christian claims.” I could suggest that Dodd’s perspective of gospel as story was in the vanguard or a precursor of a postmodern hermeneutic and that Bultmann’s perspective of the gospel as message requiring decision and particularly his program of demythologization was part of the rearguard of a modernist hermeneutic. But that might be an oversimplification and a superficial misconstrual that is less serious than Craddock’s “resolution.” So, I hasten to note that Dodd and Bultmann have much more in common than what separates them, just as postmodernism includes most of modernism, only postmodernism rehabilitates much of the premodernism that modernism thought to leave behind. Allen and Springsted 2007, 249-252, discuss how the Christian communal narrative can help in navigating through the choppy seas of other narratives in the postmodern world, citing Ludwig von Wittgenstein’s concept of communal forms of determining what we consider as fact, examples of which can be seen in Karl Barth’s word of God theology being rooted in the church’s theological space rather than in a generalized epistemology or psychology, and John Milbank’s approach in *Theology and Social Theory* (1990) which is part of a movement called Radical Orthodoxy. As for Bultmann’s provocative project of demythologizing certain biblical teachings and accounts is concerned, Allen and Springsted’s summary of the accomplishments of postmodernism would seem to suggest that postmodernism “demythologizes” modernism by deconstructing the myths that form the basis of the most extreme or narrow claims of secularism. And postmodernism also performs a service to Christian theology by redirecting it from its narrow focus on the individual and the idea or theory of

Christianity to a wider focus on the community and the form of life of Christianity. And this, according to Allen and Springsted, has opened the way to a renewed theological interest and study of the spiritual life and sense of God in Christian Communities as distinguished from a theoretical or speculative focus on the existence and action of God. Ronald Allen 1998, 47-51, discusses some of the practical and theological implications for “Preaching in the Postmodern Ethos,” including recognition that the “new hermeneutics” and the “new homiletics” are, in some measure, products of living and working in the postmodern era. And, in Chapter 7 “Theological Criteria and Interpretive Relationships in the Preaching Conversation,” in a section on “Preaching as Theological Interpretation,” under the subheading “Turns in the Preaching Conversation,” 73-80, he describes four contemporary approaches to theology that cut across the emphases which he had described in Chapter 3 as characteristic in the preaching of historic denominational groups: revisionary, post liberal, liberation, and evangelical.

[¶19] **Homiletic theologians consider several traditional devices and some newer insights and observations as they explore various narrative approaches to dealing with narrative texts in preaching, including especially the necessity of supplementing the inductive logic of narration with discursive clarifications of the sermon’s intent.**

Buttrick 1987, 333-335, discusses problems and values of some kinds of narrative preaching or ways of dealing with narrative material in the Bible including the portrayal of a character in a scriptural narrative in a dramatic monologue performance and the retelling of biblical stories as contemporary stories, supported by narrative theology. Buttrick also mentions a treatment of biblical narratives which he favors, developed mainly in Black preaching, of moving in and out of the narrative plot with interpretive commentary and analogies to contemporary experience. That approach to preaching from biblical narratives is thoroughly described by Massey 1980, 35-49.

Massey, 48, also suggests other narrative approaches to preaching a biblical story, including first-person role performance, that is, a dramatic monologue in which the preacher portrays a character in a biblical story rather than functioning strictly as narrator/commentator. Mitchell 1999, 93-95, discusses role playing along with folk storytelling in the preaching tradition of Black culture and provides an example from a sermon of S. M. Lockridge of the retelling of a biblical story with some of the elements interspersed with episodes from the preacher's own experience and acquaintanceship. Regarding dramatic monologues portraying biblical characters and retelling biblical stories as contemporary stories, Lischer 2001, 69, observes that whatever may be the values of such performances, "the otherness of the (biblical) past remains." Buttrick 1987, 335-347, develops a sketch of a sermon on the narrative text of the Ten Lepers, Luke 17:11-19, and he asserts that "the power of narrative preaching...is in its interweaving of story, theology, and experience;" and "our task is not merely to tell a good story, but to tell a story that will form theological meaning in our lives." A delicate balance between carefully using a story in a way that supports the main idea and intention of the sermon and allowing the story to communicate its own idea is described by Haddon Robinson 2001, 130-131. Don Wardlaw 1983, 70-72, discusses the importance of balancing narrative elements in a sermon with discursive sections in order to avoid leaving the hearers stranded and without a clue as to the sermon's intent (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 58, ¶ 67]). The use of discursive intervals to help people with the intention of the narrative sections is, in some sense, the inverse of the conventional structure of incorporating narrative illustrations to help listeners grasp the meaning of a mainly discursive or propositional sermon. Such interspersing of discursive sections might be especially appropriate when using the device, discussed by Jensen in a seminar, of stitching or chaining several narratives together. The title of Jensen's book *Thinking in Story* and Don Wardlaw's observation that the narrative form of

a preaching text lends itself to a narrative-like sermon on that passage and Lowry's concepts of the homiletic plot unfolding in time rather than structuring in place and Craddock's use of inductive logic and Carl's 1983, 124, observation of how Buttrick, Lowry and Fant have picked up on key narrative concepts in their discussions of sermon moves, plot, and thought blocks, are helpful in making clear that narrative preaching is not simply a matter of finding and telling stories that may somehow be associated with the intention of the text, notwithstanding the fact that Craddock 2011, 53-64, writes of how to find useful stories and Jensen speaks of stitching or chaining stories together. Craddock and Jensen are using a series of stories in a process of inductive logic or of developing a vision or mental impression anecdotally, just as historians may sometimes argue a point anecdotally with a series of stories, such as, for example, E. P. Sanders 2005, 327, acknowledges doing when assessing the level of popular respect among the Jews for the illegitimate, i.e., neither Zadokite nor Hasmonean, high priests or chief priests that were installed by the Romans.

[¶20] **Examples of the use of both deductive logic (step by step application of general principles) and inductive logic (cumulative recitation of cases) in presenting assertions, beliefs, generalizations, or conclusions can be found in classical philosophy and physical science and throughout history until now.**

Allen and Springsted 2007, 11, relate that Plato not only uses rational argument (*logos*) to arrive deductively at conclusions or convictions, but he also sometimes tells or creates stories, *mythos* not *logos*, to communicate inductively certain convictions that he holds, which he may or may not have arrived at by deduction. And, 87, they relate that Aristotle recognized that while deductive logic is inherent in the causal order of how things came to be as they are, the order of our learning and knowledge is inductive, episodic, anecdotal, and cumulative. And they note, 99-100, that for

Aristotle “The virtues are those habits or dispositions by which we can demonstrate or prove and also the developed capacity to grasp a universal truth after experience of several particular instances.” Something like an inductive way of thinking and style of communication is indicated in a comment about the preaching of Paul Tillich by Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 59: “Sometimes he used a thesis statement in his sermons, but when he did it was usually placed at the end rather than the beginning.” That was not intended as a compliment since Tillich’s lead up to the concluding thesis was not a flowing narrative but a somewhat disjointed rambling string of observations. Yet, if there is a common thread running through the rambling observations leading to the concluding thesis, then it is a good example of inductive logic even if not a good example of narrative flow. Allen and Springsted 2007, 242, also discuss an approach to ethics in postmodern moral philosophy called Phronesis which they characterize as a rounded kind of logic based on particular circumstances as distinguished from a sharp kind of logic based on fixed principles, the practical logic of everyday life decisions versus the theoretical logic of math and science. Of course, when it comes to the vaunted deductive methods of mathematics and scientific experimentation, one should keep in mind that it is induction and sometimes even hunches, intuition, or dreams, that lead scientists or mathematicians to develop speculative hypotheses, propositions, formulas, or equations that are later to be demonstrated, proved, or refuted by repeatable experiments and deductive interpretation on the basis of general principles, some of which turn out to be “universally” true, but only within certain previously unrecognized horizons or parameters. Just as preachers may have a sacramental consciousness (Theodore Wardlaw 2009 a) and a kerygmatic mode of speaking in sermon preparation and delivery, so we may also have a *narrative* consciousness which may influence our sermon preparation and delivery in subtle as well as intentional and transparent ways. Haddon Robinson 2001, 118-131, presents an

overview of deductive and inductive sermon arrangements.

[¶21] **The distinctive feature of Christianity is the fact that God is revealed to Christians and is present with us in a living person, Jesus the crucified and risen Lord, whom we know in the here and now by the faith that is given to us through Christian witnesses and the presence and work of the Holy Spirit among us. But it is misleading for Christians to suggest that either the status of the Bible as guide to the revelation of God or that Jesus' requirement of transformation in a new birth or a spiritual death and resurrection constitutes the defining distinction of the Christian faith and the Christian Way of life. While both features are true aspects of the Christian religion, they are also features that are common to some other world religions.**

Barr 1983, 2, 13-22, 47-48, 68-70, has two sobering reminders for those of us who are quite enamored of our own expository preaching commitment and who consider ourselves “people of the book:” First, the phrase “people of the book” was popularized if not originated by Muslims in reference to Christians and Jews, notwithstanding that the modern popular connotation stems from the spread of literacy and access to Bibles since the invention of the printing press (i.e., the development of a moveable type press in the occident such as had earlier been developed in the orient), according to Jensen 1993, 33-35 and Stott 1982, 32, both citing McLuhan 1962. Stott quotes John Wesley's claim of sufficiency in being a man of one book, as cited in McLuhan 1962. The term “people of the book” appears in some English translations of *The Qur'an* for an Arabic term also rendered in other places of *The Qur'an* as “those to whom the Scriptures were given.” For example, *The Holy Qur'an* 1996, Surah 9:29, provides that in lands conquered by the forces of Islam there may be limited toleration of people of the book—Jews and Christians—who do not convert to Islamic teachings, i.e., “do not believe in God or the last day,” but only if they pay a special tax to the new Islamic government. Spencer 2005, 20, and passim, cites that passage and other sections of the Qur'an in his screed against what he considers naïve, clueless, or ignorant

distinctions between the moderate and peace-loving Islamic mainstream and radical Islamic jihadists. That is like citing the most violent sections of God-commanded conquest, land-taking, and even genocide in the first and second books of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible. to show that there can be no such thing as a moderate and peace-loving Jewish and Christian mainstream that exists in the same world that has harbored radical Jewish Zionist terrorism and Palestinian Christian and Muslim terrorism and the terrorism of professional-grade hooded night-marching Klansmen (day-time chamber-of-commerce store-keepers, clergy, attorneys, judges, physicians, dentists, Presbyterian elders, Methodist stewards, Baptist deacons, Episcopalian vestrymen, Roman Catholic parish councilmen, not to mention the current day successors to those churchly extremists, their mainly unchurched spiritual progeny of white supremacist bigots most of whom don't bother to call Christianity or the Bible or any church or religious tradition to their side but rely mainly on long ago debunked conspiracy theories, racist eugenics, scare tactics and neo-Nazi propaganda. I write this in the spirit of Borg's 2003, 44, query regarding 1 Samuel 15: do you really believe that God ordered the slaughter of the Amalekites – men, women, children, livestock – and then rejected Saul from being king because he spared, i.e., took as booty, some of the livestock? *The Koran* 2006, Surah 5:12-34, "People of the Book" or "those to whom the Scriptures were given," that is, Christians and Jews, are addressed rhetorically with questions about why their practices do not agree with their professed beliefs, and why their current teachings do not agree with their scriptures. That challenge brings to mind the fact that the Christian movement was early referred to as "the Way" (Acts 9:2). In fact, the notion of the life of faith as a way or a path is the central metaphor of Israel's wisdom tradition, according to Borg 2001, 149, and that notion is not unique to the biblical faiths, and in fact the way of Jesus—dying to an old way of being and coming alive or being reborn into a new way of being—is a way that

the biblical faiths essentially have in common with the other enduring faiths of the world, according to Borg 2001, 215-218 and 2003, 103-123, 220-222. If we want to see how Christianity is distinct from the other enduring world religions, we should not focus on being people of the book or on Jesus' call to a transformed life that involves spiritual dying and rebirth, both of which are true but also have parallels in the other enduring faiths. A truly distinctive feature of Christianity is highlighted in the following paragraph seen in Borg 2003, 80:

Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of Christianity is that we find the revelation of God primarily in *a person*, an affirmation unique among the major religions of the world. For Judaism and Islam, though Moses and Mohammad are receivers of revelation, God is not revealed in them as persons, but in words of the Torah and Qur'an. So also in Buddhism: the Buddha as a person is not the revelation of God, rather, the Buddha's teachings disclose the path to enlightenment and compassion.

[¶22] **Scripture scholars, homiletic theologians and systematic theologians wrestle with the task of respecting and using the Bible's status and function as the indispensable means of keeping God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ alive in the church and world without at the same time turning the Christian faith into a legalistic book religion, such as the Pharisees did with Judaism and the Hebrew scriptures.**

We Christians are people of the *Way* (Acts 9:2) of Christ. It is clear that we Christians too, along with Muslims and Buddhists, are a people of a certain way of life. Some of the practical features of the *Christian* way of life are described by Long 2004, 14-20. The two translations of the *Qur'an/Koran* referenced above [¶ 21] vary as to where they render the same Arabic term as "people of the book" or as "those to whom the Scriptures were given," but both of them have both renderings. E. P. Sanders 2005, 404, reminds us indirectly that one of the hazards of emphasizing that we are "people of the book" is that it is an invitation to legalism or a works-based religion when he observes that the Pharisees were "basically a party of laymen who followed the path opened to them by the fact that Judaism was a religion of the Book." Johnson 1999, 52-55,

discusses the fact that by the time of the New Testament the Pharisees had become the dominant sect within Judaism by out-surviving the other sects partly because of the Pharisees' adaptability to changing situations and partly due to the waning of the other sects because of external events and pressures. And, 53, he notes that the "Rabbinic Tradition" in New Testament times "was based on the religious convictions of the Pharisees concerning Torah and was shaped by the interpretive skills of the scribes (*sopherim* = men of the book), who appeared already in the time of the restoration as interpreters of Torah (Neh. 8:4-8)." Johnson's discussion, 55-56, of halachic midrash (*halakah*—rule of action or way of walking; midrash, from the verb *darash*—to search, thus "a method of contemporizing ancient texts") indicates the system devised by the Pharisees for studying Torah (law) and related texts (Haggadah) to discover the rule or action or way to go in present circumstances, makes clear that in Judaism people of a way of acting and living and people of the book are not discretely separable. Further, Johnson, 611 [lines 12 f.], writes "Ultimately, of course, unlike Torah that is itself God's word, the New Testament canon reflects first and foremost that God's final Word is in Jesus as the Christ, a Word that, it is understood, the New Testament writers interpret through the prism of Torah and in the light of human experience." Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 102, citing Barth 1954 and Arnold B. Come 1963, have an illuminating discussion of Barth's assertion that "Christianity is only a living religion when it is 'not ashamed actually to be in all seriousness a book religion.'" To wit: "The Bible is the only direct witness to the revelation in Christ, and the church stands to lose its very faith unless it holds to the 'Israelitish concern' for the sentence, word, and letter." "This does not mean that Barth had a fundamentalist view of Scripture; The Bible shows the 'acts' of God as he revealed himself in Christ. Barth recognized the humanity of the biblical authors; he believed that man discovers behind the fallible words their infallible truth. Barth believed in preaching as explanation of the

text of Scripture in order that man might have an existential encounter with the living Word.” That is a useful clarification of Barth’s perspective on the words of the Bible, but the word explanation does not accurately describe his treatment of the Bible in his preaching and his teaching in the homiletics seminars recorded in *The Preaching of the Gospel* 1963 based on notes of his students and in *Homiletics* 1991 based on Barth’s own lecture notes, according to David Buttrick’s foreword in 1991. Barth did not insist that the sermon should *explain* the scripture passage. Rather, he insisted that the sermon should follow along the lines of the scripture passage in the preacher’s own free speech to real live people. Paraphrase is more descriptive of Barth’s method than explain. As Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 103, note: “The truth is, in practice Barth himself rarely dealt with the historical context of his text; nevertheless, his preaching does show careful exposition,” where the word exposition should be understood more in the sense of setting forth or laying down the meanings or the messages for the original recipients and for the present congregation respectively and less in the sense of explaining the text (also cited above in Chapter II [¶ 1]).

[¶23] **It is both anachronistic and contrary to existential faith experience to think of Christianity as distinctively a book religion and Christians as distinctively a people of the book.**

Another dimension of the problem with modern Christians embracing the term people of the book self referentially is that most of the Jews and Christians of the Bible lived in a time before there was a Bible, and we Christians should consider ourselves to be primarily a people of a living Lord—a people of an indwelling Spirit among the fellowship, the Spirit that empowers and makes free—rather than a people of a book. As Davis 1958, 19, wrote, “The truth we preach is not an abstract thing. The truth is a Person” (also cited below in Chapter IV [¶ 59] and by Lowry 1997,

41). Deiss 1976, 270, wrote, “The faithful of the Old Testament, like the Christians of the new covenant, could not really be ‘the people of the book,’ as the Koran (Sura 5) calls them; they were rather a people who lived the message given by their God before they wrote it down in a book.” As Proctor 1988, 45, cited in Bond 2003, 37, wrote, “The Bible did not invent God, Christ, or the church...before there was a New Testament, Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, in Joseph’s carpentry shop,” and I would add: preached, taught, healed, was crucified, arose, came again and poured out the Spirit to live among us. Bultmann 1958, 71, wrote, “...to hear the Scriptures as the Word of God means to hear them as a word which is addressed to me, as *kerygma*, as a proclamation... The fact that the word of the Scriptures is God’s Word cannot be demonstrated objectively; it is an event which happens here and now” (also cited above in Chapter II [¶ 51]). Fant 1975, 26-27, quotes Bonhoeffer 1963: “The Word is concretely present in the church as the Word of Scripture and of preaching—essentially as the latter,” with the implication that the Bible is the Word of God, but only in the church. And, as mentioned above [¶ 18, ¶23], Bonhoeffer 1975, 128, states that “with the introduction of the biblical word the text begins moving among the congregation.” “The word of God is living and active” (Heb. 4:12).

[¶24] **While Christianity predates the writing of the New Testament and, therefore, did not begin as a people of the book that includes both Old and New Testaments, and while the truly distinctive feature of Christianity is the God-With-Us Spirit of the Christ living within and among us in our faith communities, nevertheless, with God’s gift of the New Testament writings Christianity did, over time, become a strongly word-based religion.**

Wallace 1995, 18, and Ricoeur 1995, 71, discuss how Christianity quickly became, like Judaism, a word-based religion, (well before the invention of the printing press) albeit with the scriptural revelation being sustained by a primordial symbolism. Ricoeur 1995, 218-221, discusses the

inherent textuality of biblical faith. Johnson 1999, 141, wrote, “Certainly there is strong evidence to suggest that the memory of Jesus was conveyed orally in a variety of settings. But it must be remembered as well that the Christian movement was literary from the start—as evidenced by Paul’s letters (our earliest evidence of the existence of Christianity) as well as the letters from other early Christians.” And Ritschl 1963, 68-69 and passim, asserts that the proclamation of the word can only happen because of the presence of the risen Lord in the church. This helps to make sense of another repeated assertion of his that “the word rules over the church, and the church is called to bear, accept, and proclaim it; it can never be inverted so that the church rules over the word.” Sloyan 1984, 33-34, describes how the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, had over the centuries failed as “people of the book” by their abusive and slighting use of the scriptures in their worship practices and had also failed to emulate the earliest church by being “a living community created by the Spirit of God, not by a book or words.” Wilson 2007, 2, embraces the notion that Christians are a people of the Book since they “center their lives on God in Jesus Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit through Scripture.” But he also acknowledges the challenges posed by being people of the Book since “Written texts require interpretation.” And he provides citations from early church spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, and from Luther and Calvin indicating that the help of a theological “rule of faith,” and the help of objective study and, most importantly, the help of Christ and the Holy Spirit are essential to the faithful interpretation of Scripture. Thus, for Wilson, the notion that Christians are a people of the Book sounds the keynote for biblical exegesis as the starting place for sermon preparation and for his textbook *The Practice of Preaching*. And Wilson’s hermeneutical approach, that is, following historical and literary exegesis with theological exegesis that is infused with a gospel hermeneutic, that is laid out in Chapters 1 - 3 and that threads throughout the book with specific application to sermon

composition in Chapters 12 and 13, constitutes a kind of postmodern “rule of faith” for purposes of scriptural interpretation in sermon preparation. Stott 1982, 109-110, has a practical discussion of the claims that “the church wrote the Bible” versus “the Word of God creates the church.” I discuss that issue in Chapter II [¶ 51] with citations of Childs, Brueggemann, Buttrick, Ricoeur, Barr, Craddock, Deiss, Lischer, and Bonhoeffer.

[¶25] **There is a very real hazard, perhaps an inevitability, of missing the mark of true preaching, when preachers conform strictly to the path of always beginning their sermon development with a passage of scripture to be explored or explained rather than following the example of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles by starting with the most flagrant abuses of the ruling elite in religious and civil institutions and the most hurtful and oppressive conditions of the poorest and weakest of the ordinary people and addressing these situations in relation to the major scriptural themes of justice and compassion.**

Barr’s second reminder, 1983, 68-70, concerns the hazard of pride in claiming to be strictly expository preachers. This danger is illuminated by the fact that the expository teachers of apostolic times were the scribes and Pharisees and other rabbis of the Jews while Jesus and the apostles, following the example of the Hebrew prophets, were more like topical, situational, or issue-oriented preachers. They did not begin with a scripture text to be explained or set forth or with a doctrinal subject to be explored but addressed the then current situation of the malfeasances and injustices of the ruling classes as well as the infidelities and religious distortions of the priests, the scribes and the Pharisees, occasionally citing scripture texts to support their pronouncements. And they used the same topical and charismatic wisdom approach to address the pressing questions and felt needs of ordinary people. Massey’s 1980, 61-74, chapter on “Designing the Doctrinal/Topical Sermon” begins with this sentence: “The church began under the contagious ministry of an itinerant teaching preacher.” Johnson 1999, 201, points out that

even when Jesus does cite texts of Torah as in the six antithetical statements in Matthew 5:21-47, he does not cite other authorities to support his own interpretations but simply lays it out: “but I say to you.” Johnson calls this “messianic interpretation” as compared to the conventions of rabbinic interpretation in later Judaism. After all, when Mark 1:22 reports that the people in the synagogue at Capernaum were astounded because Jesus taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes, it does not mean that he was preaching from authoritative scriptures, although he sometimes did that, but, to the contrary, that he taught as one with firsthand experience of God and, most frequently, as one who saw the wisdom of God in nature or as being illuminated positively or negatively by commonly observed human activity. As George Buttrick 1931, 145, wrote, “Is it necessary that texts and topics be drawn only from the Bible? We would answer that Jesus, our Prototype in preaching as in life, bowed to no such demand. The birds of the air and the sower going forth to sow were his texts.” Borg 1999, 68-69, characterizes Jesus as a wisdom teacher of the alternative kind, presenting parables and aphorisms that pointed to a non-conventional way to God. Thus, teaching as one with authority could imply “creativity” or “originality,” one who taught from personal experience rather than from book knowledge and documentation skills, although “Rabbi” Jesus, according to the New Testament witness, sometimes backed up or illuminated his personal observations and pronouncements with compelling citations of scripture texts. Fant 1975, 32, indicates, citing Bonhoeffer 1963, 165, and his Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics, that according to Bonhoeffer the preacher cannot have the same kind of authority that Jesus had based on his unique relationship with God. And Fant, 33, notes, citing Bonhoeffer 1954, 108, that Bonhoeffer thoroughly rips and excludes any place for a cult of personality in the Christian community and asserts that any authority of a minister/preacher must lie in his or her brotherly/sisterly servant role and function in the

community of the faithful, and not in any personal qualities of attractiveness, competence, achievement, or charisma. Willimon 2005, 15-16, makes a case for authority to preach being based not only on the Word of God as recorded in Scripture but also on the Word of God as revealed and experienced in faith, citing the Apostle Paul and the Reformers Calvin and Bullinger (also cited below [¶ 35]). On the other hand, Willimon, 38-39, reaffirms the conventional notion that the apostolic preaching always began with the *assumption* of the written tradition and not with contemporary issues. Yet, as mentioned above and below, Buttrick 1994, complained that preaching which is narrowly focused on scripture exposition frequently fails to name God-with-us-in-a-being-saved-world. And Brooks 1989, 123, discusses the possible dangers, of always “taking a text” when preaching on a topic with multiple scripture references in the sermon. Old 1998, 248-9, notes that both thematic preaching and teaching and continuous exposition of the scriptures were present in the ancient synagogues and in the early churches.

[¶26] **The fact that preaching from a text of scripture can become a Bible lecture that misses the mark of addressing the word of God to people where they are in the present situations in God’s church and world does not mean that preachers should always begin with a life situation rather than with a text of scripture. Quite to the contrary: preachers should more often than not begin with a text of scripture.**

Barr’s caution about the hazards of a narrow focus on expository preaching notwithstanding, he 1980, 123, certainly thinks that preaching today should be mainly exposition of Scripture. Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 143, are surely correct, citing Evelyn Waugh’s biography of Ronald Knox, in writing that Knox’s meticulous textual explorations “supplied authority for all his sermons.” And while it is true that we worship and follow a living Lord rather than a dead letter, we do have a body of Scripture which is our God-given written guide to a proper and growing knowledge of our living Lord under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the fellowship of his people. And

while it is true that devotion to Scripture exposition alone is no guarantee against devilish distortions, and is in fact, taken alone, a guarantee of distortion; nevertheless, Scripture exposition is an important element of continual growth in the knowledge and experience of our living Lord. Other elements include the witness or testimony of the living faith communities of which we are a part and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit among us. On the other hand, Long 2005, 55, cites Walter Brueggemann in noting that biblical preaching as normative in Christian worship requires the preacher to be something of a scribe in the sense of being entrusted with the texts for the edification of the faith community. If the people recognized Jesus as speaking with authority because he was *not* preoccupied with scripture texts as their scribes were, it seems that the case with modern preachers is in some ways the reverse of this. The preacher today is not called to preach without reference to God's written word, but neither is she called to scribal proof-texting or to rabbinical wrangling over texts. But she is called to preach according to the word of scripture, to test her preaching by the scriptural word of God and by the indwelling light of Christ and by the light of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the community of faith. Johnson 1999, 238, observes with reference to the Pentecost story in Acts 2:1-4 that "the essential work of the Spirit is transforming eyewitnesses into 'ministers of the word' (Luke 1:2)." That is to say, it was after the inner transformation of the apostles signaled by the visible/audible/tactile manifestation of God's presence in the Spirit, i.e., wind and fire, that "They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." That leads me to suggest that the essential work of the Spirit in Christian preachers also includes the converse of transforming eyewitnesses into servants of the word, that is, transforming servants of the word (scribes and exegetes) into eyewitnesses, testifying to our own experience of God as present and working in our personal life, the life of our church family, the life of our civic community, and the life of our nation and world. Forbes 1989,

67-86, in a chapter on “Sermon Preparation and Preaching” suggests that the liberation and empowerment of the preacher to be a scribe or servant of the word who is also an eyewitness, and an eyewitness who is also a minister of the word—exegete, begins with the preacher’s divine call, that is, her anointing by the Holy Spirit to bring good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives, and continues through every aspect and stage and function of the process and work of sermon preparation. And I would add that such liberation and empowerment continues through every aspect of the anointed preacher’s ongoing theological education and scriptural formation. Deiss 1976, 307, discusses the paradoxical nature of the preacher’s vocation as one who “speaks with authority and yet has no authority over the message he transmits; he is only a steward, yet it is the very treasures of God that his lips reveal to the world!” Massey 1974, 93-94, discusses the general respect in which preaching was held among the people of Israel from the time of Moses until the time of Jesus, and also the unique authority of Jesus’ own manner of preaching. The title of Craddock 1983 (1971, 1974, 1979), *As One Without Authority*, alludes to the matter discussed in Chapter 1, “The Pulpit in the Shadows,” that is, in part, the loss of a general public respect for preaching and attribution of authority to the kind of preaching that proves the scriptural soundness of its message by way of deductive rhetoric. But that doesn’t mean that the authoritative importance of scripture is diminished in Craddock’s new homiletic. He, 119-142, writes at length in Chapter 6 “Inductive Movement and the Text” about the importance and foundational function of the scriptural text when the preacher uses a narrative or inductive approach in communicating the message.

[¶27] **The above counsel for preachers and worship planners to keep abreast of everything so that no calendar and no scripture expository principle and no liturgical theology and no social commentary or activism becomes a comfortable habit that obscures or ignores**

important issues and needs in church and world is admittedly a daunting challenge.

Skudlarek 1991, 356, articles numbered 35 & 36, addresses that challenge:

To have a comprehensive knowledge of the social, political and economic forces shaping the contemporary world, while at the same time specializing in scriptural exegesis and theology and being pastorally competent may well appear to be an overwhelming, even impossible, expectation to lay on any one person. The point to be made here, however, is not that preachers must know everything, but rather that there is no limit to the sources of knowledge and insight that a preacher can draw upon. There are many avenues which lead toward a deeper understanding of the human condition. Some will travel most easily down the avenue of the social sciences, others down the avenue of literature and the arts, others down the avenue of popular culture. What ultimately matters is not which avenue we take, but what we take with us as we travel. As long as we carry the Word of God with us, a word that we have allowed to touch our own lives in prayer and reflection, and as long as we speak that word in language and images that are familiar to the dwellers of the particular avenue we are traveling, the Word of God will be preached, and the possibility of faith and conversion will be present.

But while it is true that no one preacher can travel down every possible avenue of sermon preparation, I would caution against the plethora of “helpful” shortcuts including lectionary based commentaries such as Fuller 1974 and 2006; works that provide topical classifications of lectionary texts, such as Gonzalez and Gunsalus 1980, 40-45; Hessel 1983; and Procter-Smith 1985; and issue-oriented alternative lectionaries such as Procter-Smith 1993 and Miriam Therese Winter 1990; and lectionaries designed for the exploration of non-canonical texts such as Butcher 2002. All such “helpful” resources have a tendency to divert the preacher from the work of theological and general study and basic exegesis and developing her own responsible exposition in terms of current issues and needs at her own particular place in church and world. For example, rather than create or use a more “feminist” lectionary including non-canonical texts such as Procter-Smith 1993, 54-57, suggests, one might study more generally the homiletic wisdom and guidance of feminist theologians. Two recent publications promise to be very pointed and helpful in this regard: the NRSVue, a 2022 update of the NRSV which, according to

Taussig 2022, incorporates over 2000 edits that, for example, rephrase certain references to female persons and to people who are differently abled physically, emotionally, or mentally; and the 58 volume *Wisdom Commentary* series which is promoted by the publisher, *Liturgical Press*, as providing the best of current feminist biblical scholarship to help preachers, teachers, scholars, and all readers in their advancement toward God's vision of dignity, equality, and justice for all," according to a review in *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*, Fall 2021, p. 29. The preacher would do well to stick with his usual preaching schedule or lectionary, whether calendar or continuous, and make continual reference to the appropriate passage in the NRSVue and the appropriate volume of *The Wisdom Commentary* rather than resort to a calculated so-called feminist lectionary. Proclaiming the gospel of liberation from whatever kind of oppression is current locally or across the world does not require selecting texts for that purpose if one is committed to reading and preaching from the whole of canonical scripture and doing so with an unblinking hermeneutic of scriptural, theological, and societal openness and awareness. On the other hand, such openness can certainly be enhanced by the study of the aforementioned issue-oriented alternative lectionaries as a consciousness-raising exercise.

[¶28] **Preachers who sense a need in church and society and a responsibility on their part to use the pulpit in helping to equip the congregation for confronting and dealing with some important issue of moral concern should consider carefully planned approaches that partner the pulpit with other means and resources for involving the congregation in exploring the issue.**

I acknowledged in concluding the previous paragraph that an issue-oriented lectionary could be studied by a preacher to raise his own consciousness so as not to miss an opportunity presented by the text of the day in his usual lectionary to address, say, feminist issues for example. And, of course, any text in the Gospels identified by feminist theologians as useful for addressing

feminist issues is already scheduled as the principal text of some Sunday in The Open Bible Lectionary. And any such texts in the Epistles or the Old Testament will eventually be the principal text of the day for some preacher somewhere who is preaching continuous Epistle series every summer and continuous Old Testament series every fall. As Craddock 2011, 129-136, has pointed out, people may be more receptive to a sermon on a controversial subject when it is occasioned by a text appointed in a calendar lectionary or a continuous series through a book of the Bible rather than being occasioned by one of the preacher's theological or societal preoccupations. On the other hand, there will be times when a preacher hears the voice of God's Word and Spirit calling through voices in church and society to depart from the usual lectionary and select texts for a more focused and sustained emphasis on some issue that cannot be had by only taking it up occasionally when a schedule of preaching texts presents a one- or two-sermon opportunity. The latter approach can provide affirmation and growth for the already convinced but is not likely to help release a potential change of heart and or change of action in the unconvinced. When such a call comes the preacher should consider other more effective approaches than adopting an issue-oriented lectionary since such lectionaries may tend to subvert one of the main advantages of calendar and continuous lectionaries, i.e., dismounting preachers from their issue or topical hobbyhorses. An issue-oriented lectionary is likely to turn the pastor into a one-note, one-song, hobbyhorse preacher, which will surely be more of a turn-off than a heart-changer. Rather than adopt an issue-oriented lectionary, the preacher might interrupt her regular lectionary course with a series of 4 to 6 sermons on an emergent concern with enough advance planning to invite existing study and discussion groups to interrupt their current curricula to explore the issue addressed in the short sermon series using pastor-suggested and other study and discussion materials and perhaps making local resource persons available for

consultations and/or sharing the pulpit with such persons, and perhaps a general congregational fellowship gathering with a panel of discussants representing various perspectives on the issue at hand. All the better if the pastor consults the congregation's leadership council in developing such a coordinated program emphasis.

[¶29] **The nature of preaching and the integrity and power of the Bible itself simply do not allow for the use of “sermon helps,” “lectionary aids,” or reliance upon “sermon services,” or the published sermons of others in sermon preparation or in preaching.**

I have several citations on the unhelpful distractions of “sermon helps” and less than first rate commentaries in Chapter V [e.g., ¶ 13]. Lischer 2001, 3, asserts that “If coherence is to be achieved, we need not only exegetes who take preaching seriously (such as the academic scripture scholars who authored the volumes of the *Interpretation* series of commentaries on the books of the Bible published by John Knox Press between the mid 1980's and the early 2000's) but preachers who take exegesis seriously, for whom sermon preparation is more than a Saturday's expedition into *The Interpreter's Bible*, *Proclamation*, *Gospel in Life*, or a host of disreputable sermon ‘services’.” Even the highest quality and allegedly rigorous and wide-ranging online sermon resources and downloadable applications will inevitably narrow the preacher's research horizon by their necessary selectivity. This fact is attested by Lischer's sequel to his statement quoted above: “The coherence we seek, however, lies at a level deeper than the partnership between exegesis and preaching. It springs from the unity and coherence of the gospel itself.” And, further, Lischer, 48-62, in his chapter on “Preaching as the Word of God,” makes clear, 53, 59, that our confident faith in God's freedom and power to use even frail vessels such as we all are to make our preaching a proclamation of his Word should in no wise be used to excuse our lazy use of shortcuts such as so-called “sermon helps” and “lectionary

aids” in sermon preparation, and certainly not the fraudulent business of plagiarizing or paraphrasing someone else’s sermon or adapting someone else’s sermon outline. As Lischer, 60, wrote and emphasized at the top of a paragraph on the fluid and fleeting nature of language, “*The sermon is the Word of God for a particular time, place and people.*” So. the pastor preaches as one who lives and works in the same time and place as the congregation. If the preacher is not able to do the primary exegetical work of rendering one’s own translation of the text from the Hebrew or Greek, then the preacher must at least do the secondary work of basing his exegetical study on a conversation with the best scholarly commentaries available and leave the tertiary “sermon helps” resources behind except for an occasional glance to see what connections between text and present situation one may have missed. But, in the main, as Barbara Brown Taylor 1999, 93 and 2001, 157, has asserted, we must find our own connections of the text with our time and place rather than try to own or adapt the connections that someone else in a different time and place has found (also cited in Chapter V [¶ 5]).

[¶29.1] **When preaching is recognized as a 3-way transaction between the preacher, God and a particular congregation at a particular time and place, then it is clear that the preacher must rely upon his or her own prayer, study, thinking, and conversation without the interference and distraction of checking out the “helps” or the sermon work of others.**

Wilson 2007, 162-165, emphasizes that the gospel has a definite form in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, that is, the form of the “deep structure” of “trouble and grace.” And he insists that, 164 shaded area, “To preach the gospel means that the sermon needs something of the plot, movement, and shape of the gospel,” that is, the movement from death to life, trouble to grace. But he also acknowledges that, 163, “Of course the gospel is not the gospel until it addresses the particular circumstances of an individual or community life, thus

the *expression* of the gospel will vary from situation to situation” (emphasis added). Wilson, 165, has a quotation from Barth’s *Prayer and Preaching* regarding the preacher’s personal transformation or spiritual renewal during thorough self-preparation for preaching that surely rules out the possibility of preaching someone else’s sermon. Preaching from the sermon work of others is also ruled out by Wilson’s definition, 188: “Preaching is personal communication that uses eye contact and is based on this time and place, in the personal and social needs of this hour, as preacher and congregation experience God’s Word together.” And Wilson, 256-259, declares that the final step in composing the sermon with a gospel hermeneutic is to *proclaim* the gospel; that is, to speak God’s love and grace directly as God’s spokesperson to the assembled congregation. That is, 257, citing Gerhard O. Forde, the preacher is to do to/for the congregation “what the text authorizes.” Massey 1980, 64, was writing about the great cost to the preacher in time, work, thought and prayer involved in preparing a teaching sermon that deals adequately with some important doctrine of the church when he quoted Richard John Neuhaus: “A Christian congregation has a right to expect that their preacher and teacher has thought, read, pondered, puzzled, and prayed over the matter at hand and that he (or she) is prepared to share the harvest.” Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 223, report that Norman Vincent Peale’s public speaking and preaching career got off to a very shaky start: “His first sermon was preached at Walpole, Massachusetts. He was so petrified with fear that he wired his father (a Methodist pastor) for help. His father replied by wire: ‘Prepare your own sermons. Just tell the people that Jesus Christ can change their lives. Love, Dad.’” And, as Barth 1991, 89-90, taught his preaching seminar colleagues in the 1930’s regarding “Criteria for the Sermon:” “Preaching must take place in humility and soberness and as the prayer of those that realize that God himself must confess their human word if it is to be God’s Word.” That is, “...standing before the mystery of the gracious

God, we confess that it is not in our power that our human word should be God's Word.

Preaching, then, must become prayer...Our attitude, then, must be controlled from above:

nothing from me, all things from God, no independent achievement, only dependence on God's

grace and will." Massey 1974, 82-84, has a section, "*Preaching that lives will be done with a*

sense of partnership with God and Christ," which first makes clear, citing 1 Pet. 1:12 referring to

the ministry of "those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from

heaven," that partnership is activated not so much by the preacher's claim or attitude as by the

Holy Spirit working through the preaching such that the congregation hears the preached gospel

as word of God. Then Massey's exposition goes on to spell out the importance and dimensions

of the preacher's *sense* of partnership with God and Christ through the Holy Spirit, which leads

into his next assertion, 84-86, "*The sermon that would live and make alive must be rooted in the*

Word of God."

[¶30] **The Greek cultural virtues reflected in the qualifications for pastors and bishops announced in the pastoral epistles (letters to Timothy and Titus) and the Hebrew concept of anointing by the Spirit reflected in the divine call to service of the prophets (preachers), Jesus, and the apostles exclude the possibility that preachers (prophesiers) can rely on the sermon work, lecture notes, or lesson plans of others in their preparation for particular preaching and teaching occasions.**

Barth's 1991, 67-69, notions of the divine and human sides of the call to ministry based on the

Hellenistic virtues reflected in the rules for bishops and deacons in the pastoral epistles simply

do not allow for the use of sermons that others have prepared for another place and time or for

the use of exportable sermons for any place and any time since bishops and pastors, unlike the

apostles, are appointed to particular places at particular times, and it is required that they "be able

to teach," that is, use their theological education and the help of the Holy Spirit to prepare

scriptural messages with a certain congregation's situation at a particular time in mind.

A pastor or bishop, if questioned or challenged, should be able to explain or defend their sermon content on the basis of their own knowledge of scripture and sound theology, according to Titus 1:9. The specificity of the time and place context and constant urgency of honest and faithful sermon preparation and lively preaching is portrayed by Gardner C. Taylor 1977, 78-81, using the analogy of the watchman, chosen by a community and relieved of ordinary occupations and pursuits in order to remain at his or her post in constant vigilance, scanning the horizon in order to sound the alarm at the first sign of danger from an expected enemy assault. Forbes 1989 traces the notion of Holy Spirit anointing in the divine call and equipping of prophets and preachers throughout the Bible and especially in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles from the perspective of his own background and experience in the recovery of the language of Holy Spirit anointing for preaching in the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic movements of the late 19th century through the 20th century (also referenced below [¶ 68]). It is especially noteworthy that many of the same psycho-social structures and themes that are seen in the discussions of mainstream Catholic and Protestant theologians under the headings of spiritual formation and vocation (Catholic parlance) or calling (Protestant parlance) to pastoral, priestly, clerical, sacramental, preaching, ecclesiastical service are also seen in the teaching of Forbes, a Black Pentecostal homiletic theologian, regarding Holy Spirit anointing (Pentecostal parlance) of preachers. Those psycho-social structures and themes common to discussions of Catholic vocation, Protestant call, and Pentecostal anointing are: family influence and training, cultural influence and training, natural gifts, aptitudes and personal qualities, communal support and guidance, the communal, ecclesiastical context of the knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit by people of faith, a process over time as well as moments of recognition, insight, revelation, awakening, infusion,

inspiration, confirmation or validation of the subject's claim of a divine call in the customary processes of the subject's faith community or pastoral/ecclesiastical overseers. The language of Holy Spirit anointing with reference to preachers sometimes appears in mainstream Protestantism quite apart from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, an example of which is seen in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 269, in a lengthy citation of an unpublished paper by James I. Packer presenting his reflections on the preaching of Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899-1981) (also referenced below [¶ 68]). Barth 1991, 81-84, under the heading of "Originality" declares that preachers must do sermon preparation in such a way that they come before the congregation as themselves hearers and are to share what they themselves have received through the study of the Word since, 83, "Even the best things, when taken over from others, are no longer what they were when spoken by those others." Surely this does not provide license to take someone else's sermon work done in a different place and time as a gift from heaven but rules out the use of the preached and published sermons of others in sermon preparation.

[¶31] **Preachers may well study the biographies, sermon preparation approaches, and even the published sermon manuscripts of distinguished preachers in order to enrich their own sermon preparation disciplines and enlarge their repertoire of effective sermon forms, but will surely be hindered by taking even a quick peek at someone else's sermon outline or manuscript on the text or theme that they themselves presently have in preparation.**

Von Allmen 1962, 14, allows for the possible usefulness of published sermons as devotional reading for congregations but not as crutches for preachers. Preachers, of course, may find it useful to read published sermons for the purpose of studying the homiletic strategies used by experienced and respected preachers, as Davis 1958 did in preparing his well-received and widely used book. He analyzed homiletic strategies reflected in transcripts of sermons preached

by distinguished pastors on the “National Radio Pulpit” series. Preachers may also study the sermon and homiletic teaching work of others in order to discern and evaluate the theological perspectives and homiletic definitions represented in historic Christian preaching and in the teaching and writing approaches used by various homiletic theologians as Barth 1999, 19-44, does in the first eight chapters of his *Homiletics*. If preachers read published sermons devotionally or to study homiletic strategies and definitions, we should avoid contemporaneously reading sermons on our sermon texts or themes or topics in preparation. Massey 1980, 83-96, has a chapter “Studying the Methods of Master Preachers” which could serve as a guide to learning from the effective homiletic strategies that important preachers have used without falling into the trap of doing a treasure hunt for the secret key to developing a sermon on the text at hand. Of course, reading a published sermon is far different from hearing a sermon preached. Mitchell 1990, 8, reports a discovery by some of his students that the oral-aural versus print-reading gap could be partially ameliorated by reading published sermons *out loud*. Massey 1980, 86-87, makes clear the limitations and possibilities of gaining some sense of what a sermon was like when preached with the participation of a worshiping congregation by studying a published sermon script, and he notes that the yawning gap between the experience of participating in the preaching of a sermon as a hearer in a worshiping congregation and reading or studying a published sermon script “has made some preachers have deep misgivings about publishing their sermons since, as George Arthur Buttrick (1959, 9) so rightly explained, ‘the congregation “makes” the sermon almost as much as the preacher makes it,’ adding, ‘Remove the prayer-worship, the brooding of the Spirit on the worshiping congregation, and how much of the sermon is left? A sermon is an “offering” on the altar.’” But, acknowledging the limitations of studying published sermons, a preacher may by such study add to his or her repertoire or quiver of

homiletic strategies and possibly enrich one's imaginative and compelling use of language.

Gardner C. Taylor 1977, 63-65, has an extensive list of "the recognized masters of pulpit discourse" that a preacher may study "not to copy them but rather to see what has been the way in which they approached the Scriptures, their craftsmanship, their feel for men's hearts." Taylor, has a thumbnail characterization of the most impressive quality of each preacher listed, and he, 65, has the following quote that exposes just one aspect of my repeated caution against studying someone else's sermon on the same text on which one is currently developing a sermon:

"Robertson Nicoll, whose comments on the English and Scottish preachers of the late nineteenth century are unrivalled for touching insight and sharp analysis, said that if you read a sermon of McClaren's you must take his outline or get another text, so apt and inescapable was the logic of McLaren's mind." I am, therefore, more convinced than ever that reading anyone else's sermon on the same text or sermon subject that one currently has in preparation can only serve as a distraction, or a barrier or a snare or, at the very best, a waste of precious time. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 112, citing Bethge, ed., Bonhoeffer 1961, report that among Bonhoeffer's practical suggestions for constructing a sermon there is this simple observation: "The preacher should not read other sermons on his same text before his own outline has been completed. If he does he will become dependent upon the thoughts of others, which makes the way to mature proclamation difficult." And I would add that having developed one's own sermon plan on a text, reading someone else's sermon on the same text will be counterproductive and a waste of time, which is not to say that one should never evaluate and reevaluate one's own sermon plan, just not by reading someone else's sermon on the same text. Something that would greatly enhance the benefits of studying the published sermon scripts of recognized preachers would be studying their biographies to discover how their life situations and personal travails, failures and

triumphs have shaped them and their preaching, and thus to gain strength, freedom and insight to allow one's own preaching to be enlivened by the depths of one's own experience in life.

Gardner C. Taylor 1970, 65-73, has a provocative discussion of the contributions of life situation and personal struggle to the work of creative artists of various kinds, including the arts of preaching and apostleship. Saldine 2011, 5-8, discusses the importance of preaching with a sense of rootedness, specifically an awareness of the place where one lives and the place where one's hearers live; and also a sense of "sentness," an awareness of the world into which preacher and hearers are sent for life and work and witness.

[¶32] **Preaching from a schedule of assigned texts challenges and helps preachers to avoid riding their hobby horses of favorite texts and themes. The use of practical worship and preaching aids that are keyed to the lectionary can enhance that dismounting service of a lectionary or can merely remount the preacher on the hobby horses of the help providers. So, watch out!**

In the event that preachers and worship committees do resort to practical shortcuts and helps, care must be taken that such thematic and issue-oriented resources are used to broaden the preacher's and people's awareness, sensitivity, and resourcefulness, and not used in a way that subverts the lectionary's service of dismounting preachers and people from their thematic hobby horses. The hazard of thematic hobby horses in preaching is amusingly illustrated in the following quotation of George Buttrick in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 262,

Topical preaching easily becomes repetitive and shallow. The preacher there exploits his own mood and interests and is found threshing over and over the same old straw. We know of a minister who for several years preached against Christian Science and against the saloon *ad nauseum*. He drove several of his congregation to Christian Science; how many he drove to drink is not told.

The function of lectionary preaching, whether calendar or continuous, of helping preachers avoid their issue oriented hobby horses is frustrated enough by the fact that, as Long 2005, 73,

observes, “any preacher unwise enough to use the pulpit as a private forum can manage to throw a saddle over any text, no matter how it is selected.” But I insist that the preacher who is not only committed to an important moral cause but also well informed about it will be supplied frequently enough with legitimate scriptural texts in either a calendar lectionary or a continuous lectionary and need not be diverted to an issue-oriented lectionary. Long 2005, 224, acknowledges the usefulness of the Internet as a powerful research tool for preachers but cautions against the temptation to find ready-made homiletical materials there, a practice which compromises our integrity and honesty as preachers who bear our own witness rather than the false witness of putting someone else’s witness out as if it were our own. A possible exception to my caution about commentaries designed for teachers and preachers is the *Interpretation* series published by John Knox Press. The writers are, generally, first rate theologians and exegetes who do not limit their commentaries to the lectionary pericopes and who, when they do mention the lectionary or church calendar setting of a passage, are careful to keep any practical suggestions for teachers and preachers to a vague minimum. Thank God for their restraint!

[¶33] **It is impossible to *preach* from someone else’s sermon work and those in the habit of trying do not *preach*. But they do carry a heavy burden of confusion, unfaith, and repressed guilt covered over with secret self-congratulation for their own worldly-wise practicality and expedience as church managers. And they display something that looks like laziness. But the truth is that they just don’t like to think or else they have not yet mastered the discipline of setting aside the necessary time for the hard study and thought that are required for sermon preparation. Or perhaps they are truly not clear about their calling and job description which includes preparing sermons by doing their own basic study and thinking.**

When it comes to using the printed sermons or sermon outlines of others, I have never been able to do it, not even when, in desperation, I tried. The effort weighed me down with feelings of

dishonesty, guilt, and laziness. Willimon 2005, 72, notes “the roots of clerical sloth are theological rather than primarily psychological. We become lazy and slovenly in our work because we have lost the theological rationale for the work.” Gerald Kennedy, as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 148, “lists laziness and attention to trivial demands as the two main enemies of the preacher’s study.” And he “insists that the church must begin to guard the preacher’s time so that he *can* adequately prepare.” But I insist that too much attention to trivial demands and laziness are only symptomatic of deeper problems and confusions, and that only the pastor can protect the pastor’s study and preparation time. David Buttrick once remarked that “some preachers just don’t like to think.” Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 87, do not cut any slack for preachers who lack originality or self-expression or invention in their sermons: “A second hindrance (to originality) is found in native indolence. Original thinking is difficult, laborious, and usually slow, the hardest work that men ever attempt. Who can wonder that easy borrowing, or even shameless stealing, is so often substituted.” But I do wonder because such expedients cannot be easy or guiltless for one trained in the work of sermon preparation. It is not merely a matter of laziness, as Broadus and Weatherspoon intimate, and not even sloth induced by theological confusion, as Willimon suggests. A habit of plagiarism must be grueling, guilt-lading, and exhausting work. Buttrick’s 1987, 86-87, observation that each speaker has his or her own syntax surely indicates that preaching someone else’s sermon requires tremendous work of syntactical transposing if one is to sound like oneself. Mitchell’s 1990, 95-96, discussion of “The Use of Subjectivity and Rhetorical Flair” in Black culture implicitly excludes the performance of someone else’s sermon since subjectivity means getting emotionally into the preaching of a message from God, and since rhetorical flair refers to an individualized style of speaking. The dictum that crime gets easier on the conscience with practice simply does not apply with this

crime. I cannot think of anything more labor intensive, dread-inducing, and emotionally exhausting than being caught in one's own trap of performing someone else's sermon every week and trying to make it seem like actual preaching and trying to convince oneself that one is doing one's job. John Calvin's standard for the integrity of message and messenger, summarized by Fant and Pinson 1995 II, 144, citing Leroy Nixon 1950, 58, does not leave any wiggle room for performing or reciting someone else's sermon: the preacher "must 'ratify and seal in effect the doctrine he bears,' and that what he says 'he has so conceived in his heart, and has it so printed and engraved in him, that it is as though he spoke before God'" (also cited in Chapter V [¶ 8]). Speaking from someone else's sermon will always fail Bonhoeffer's 1975, 179, test of subjective genuineness: "Do I believe what I say? Or am I just making official sounds." Wilson 2007, 60, notes that every text in the Bible has multiple concerns from which different preachers at different times and places might choose a different concern for the major theme statement of their sermon. And that is one reason why one preacher cannot preach truth from another minister's sermon. And not only that, even if two preachers choose the same concern in the text to develop their theme statements for the sermon, their actual theme statements would differ, and even in the extremely unlikely event that their theme statements were near identical, each would have a different way of developing that theme statement in the sermon. So, no one can *preach* someone else's sermon. Long 2004, 18-19, discusses witness to Christian faith as a matter of being truly alive in the Christian Way and of inviting others to come alive in the Christian Way by our words and example. And I say that the preacher whose sermon preparation is based on the sermons and preaching programs of others is not alive in the Christian Way and cannot call others into aliveness in the Christian Way, having himself or herself already died as a witness.

the act of preaching has been set forth by preachers and homiletic theologians in a variety of apt definitions, values, analogies, and images.

If it is true, as Long 2004, 32-38, suggests, that the church's worship service is the language school where the people of the Way learn to speak the Christian faith in their walk and conversation within the fellowship and out in the world, that lively speaking can surely not be modeled by a preacher whose sermon preparation consists mainly of adapting the sermons and preaching programs of others or, for that matter, by preachers whose primary preparation resources are those crutches called "sermon helps" or "lectionary aids," which more often than not end up being an intrusion on or a diversion from genuine sermon preparation. Fant and Pinson 1995 V, 244, have a quote of Joseph Parker (1830-1902): "The element of personal experience and testimony is essential to true preaching. No matter who else has seen Christ, if I have not seen Him myself, I cannot preach Him." The criminal activity by a seminary trained pastor of presenting someone else's sermon as one's own preaching mocks the line in the hymn "God is Here" by Fred Pratt Green, 1979; rev. 1988, music by Cyril Vincent Taylor, 1941, which affirms that God is present "in honesty of preaching." If worshipers encounter God in dishonest preaching, it must be God crying and grieving over his lost and unfaithful undershepherd. Laziness is a character flaw. But the character flaw at issue here is dishonesty and a failure to establish and honor the necessary work priorities of a preacher. Some ministers simply allow their attention and energies and time to be diverted from the disciplines needed for sermon preparation to other important and pressing tasks, challenges, and opportunities for service. It is a matter of setting sermon preparation as a high priority. I discuss pastoral priorities in the last four paragraphs of this Chapter, and I cite helpful perspectives from several homiletic theologians including especially Willimon 1981. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 88-92, discuss

plagiarism, borrowing, and crediting sources of ideas. Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 122, write of speaking a sermon rather than sermon delivery because the word delivery “can suggest a distance in relationship between the content of the sermon and the act of preaching,” distance that is inevitable when one tries to deliver someone else’s sermon. Similarly, Long 2005, 226, notes that a sermon only exists in the preaching moment and does not exist in the notes or manuscript which may or may not be laid on the pulpit desk. Perish the demonic or subversive thought that one could lay down notes from someone else’s sermon and then proceed to engage the congregation in a Spirit filled proclamation of God’s love for God’s people! Blackwood 1946, 3 ff., uses clarifying imagery: a preacher is called to be both artist and artisan, that is, a design architect who also has skills and union cards in construction trades and who personally builds the house he has designed, not a carpenter who follows someone else’s blueprint. I see an apt parallel to this image in Allen and Springsted’s 2007, 8-9, contrast between the creative work of God according to Genesis and the non-creative work of the craftsman in Plato’s *Timaeus* story. That is not to say that the preacher can, God-like, create a sermon out of nothing. But neither can one, Timaeus-like, produce a sermon by tinkering with someone else’s sermon outline or manuscript. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 335, observe, in reference to effective preaching, that while it is essential for an actor to fully identify with the character he is portraying, such identification should come naturally and perfectly to the preacher who has done his own work since he is portraying – himself! Bonhoeffer 1975, 147, cautions that reading other sermons on a sermon text before developing one’s own sermon outline on the same text is more hindrance than help, and I insist it is best not to read other sermons on the text at hand at all.

[¶35] **Preaching from the sermon work of others is implicitly ruled out by every serious definition of preaching even though the practice of**

stealing the messages of other preachers has a millennia-old history. But God is not pleased.

Preachers, by definition, *must* prepare our own sermons. Otherwise, we are not preachers, and we are not preaching. As Barbara Brown Taylor's 1993, 33, definition makes clear, preaching involves *finding our own words* for bringing to life the connections that *we* have found between the word in Scripture and the word at work in our life and in the life of the congregation and the world, emphasis added. The definition of preaching as "truth through personality" in Brooks (1835-1893) 1989, 23-43, makes clear, 39, that trying (one never succeeds) to preach someone else's sermon meets neither the standard of truth-telling nor that of communicating through one's own transformed personality. The truth of the gospel that another preaches is the same truth that you are called to preach. But the truth in *his* sermon is only true as *he* preaches it. The one truth of the gospel becomes a lie when one tries to preach another's sermon. Brooks, 85, puzzles over the unfaithfulness of one who would try to preach someone else's sermon but would not cheat anywhere else and suggests that an imperfect grasp of the gospel of grace may have loosened the pull of morality "as the earth's gravitation weakens for him who mounts among the stars." If the church's witness to what God in Christ is doing and intending in the world today is seriously weakened by pastors who impersonate preachers by attempting to perform the sermons of others, the problem is not new. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 87, in the opening paragraph of his chapter on "What Man Has Done" (in response to what God has done in his Word in both written witnesses and his Word in the contemporaneous human witnesses of teachers sent to interpret and reorient [or recontextualize] the written Word in every new age and situation), reminds us of the ancient tradition of preachers stealing the sermon work of others: "God sent his prophets (preachers), most of whom were content to steal their message 'every one from his neighbor' (Jer. 23.30)..."

NRSV: “See, therefore, I am against the prophets (preachers), says the Lord, who steal my words from one another.” Long’s 2005, 50, acknowledgement that the preacher as one who stands up from among the congregation to bear witness to the faith is not a neutral observer but is actively involved with the message and with the particular struggles and mission of the faith community from which he comes to the pulpit and to which he preaches surely makes it clear and certain that speaking from someone else’s sermon manuscript or outline is not preaching. Even more telling is Lischer’s 2001, 76-92, view of the church’s preaching as all the ways that the church talks to itself including the sermon preached by the pastor, in the ongoing process of forming and reforming itself as a faith community, a community of contrast to the secular community. The congregation may talk to itself by making the hymns and spiritual songs and anthems and liturgical prayers and pastor’s humbly wrought homely homilies their own. But when the minister cribs from other people’s sermons or outlines, there is no way that the congregation can make that fraud into a true and honest part of the church’s formative work of talking to itself, that is, a true and honest part of the church’s preaching. And, according to Lischer, 3, as noted above, neither will the so-called sermon cobbled together by Saturday expeditions into various sermon preparation helps and lectionary aids. On the other hand, according to Lischer 3 & 76-92, if the minister brings forth a sermon effort out of her serious theological and exegetical work, the congregation can make this a part of their internal conversation of communal faith formation, that is, the preaching of the church. Farmer 1942, 87, observes, citing Oman, that there is a vital difference between speaking with authority and speaking from authorities. I cited Barr 1983, 68-70, above [¶ 25] regarding Jesus’ teaching authority, which according to Mark 1:22 is not based on citing authorities, that is, scriptures (also referenced below [¶ 95]). But our authority in preaching must come both from the word of God in scripture and the word of God in our own

faith experience of Christ (also referenced below [¶36, ¶s 93, 94, 95]). Willimon's 2005, 15-16, discussion of authority to preach and preaching being itself the word of God, citing the Apostle Paul and the Reformers Calvin and Bullinger (also cited above [¶ 25]), does not allow for preaching from someone else's outline or manuscript.

[¶36] **Preaching should draw people to Christ by being a demonstration of the power of the Spirit and should lead the congregation in the language of its conversation and journey of continual growth and formation as a community of contrast with the civil community, a joyful community that is nourished by the preacher's visible joy in preaching that is necessarily sustained by his or her joy in the earnest work of sermon preparation which includes pastoral work with groups and individuals.**

Keller 2015, 17, cites Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 2:4 "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God." Keller responds to Paul's words to the effect that the goal of changing people's lives through the proclamation of Christ can only be achieved if that preaching is accompanied by a demonstration of the Spirit's power: "So this is the Christian preacher's power. This is how to deliver not just an informative lecture but a life-changing sermon. It is not merely to talk about Christ but to show him, to demonstrate his greatness and to reveal him as worthy of praise and adoration. If we do that, the Spirit will help us, because that is his great mission in the world." Can the Spirit help the minister who cribs her sermons from someone else's life and work? Yes, of course. But how and to what end? Let the reader answer with great care and in an attitude of humble prayer. Perhaps another useful vocation and ministry besides preaching awaits her. The fact that preaching authority must be based on faith experience as well as reference to Scripture is not contrary to Craddock's 1971 *As One Without Authority* which refers to the fact that preaching no longer

enjoys an assumed or granted authority based on the phenomenal expansion of Christianity and ecclesiastical power during its first almost two millennia. Lischer 2001, 1-5, lists preaching's loss of authority as one of the consequences of "The Exclusion of Preaching from Theology." The other consequences that Lischer lists point in the direction of, and the remainder of the book spells out, what he thinks needs to happen in order for preaching to be readmitted to the theological academy and regain its ecclesiastical and public authority, and that is, concluding in Chapter 6 "Preaching as the Church's Language," for the church to turn back from preaching as event that targets the persuasion, comfort and judgment of individual subjects in the congregation to the *church's* preaching as formation – all of the ways that the church talks to itself in its continuing growth and development as a community of faith, including the minister's sermon as one contributing element in that process. A major thesis of Craddock's work is that the lack of assumed or granted authority in Christian preaching during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be addressed by the strategy of shifting from a propositional or deductive style and structure in sermons to a narrative or inductive structure and style. What goes on exhibit is not the preacher's skill and cleverness in deductive logic but rather the Spirit of God helping the preacher to use the stories of life as a way into the Story of Life. Paul wrote that "If there is no resurrection from the dead, then... we (believers) are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:13, 19). And I write that the preacher who does not do her or his own work but tries to breathe life into the sermons or outlines of others is of all preachers most to be pitied. One who habitually resorts to sermon helps, pulpit aids, and the outlines, manuscripts or audio recordings of others rather than doing their own work by way of daily devotional reading of scripture and serious study of scripture, theology, history, literature, social psychology, world events, along with eager participation in their own parish/congregation and larger ecclesiastical

and civil communities will eventually expose their own emptiness and underlying despair in the emotional tenor of their sermon delivery. He or she will certainly miss “the joy of preaching” (Brooks 1989), and the hearers will also miss being uplifted by that infectious joy. I discuss Brooks’ definition of preaching as “truth through personality” in Chapter IV with citations from Willimon 1981 and 2005, putting Brooks’ characterization in historical and theological context and perspective. It leaves no wiggle room for “preaching” from sermons prepared by someone else. The final chapter of Blackwood 1946 is entitled “The Joy of Preparing to Preach.” There cannot be much joy in the preaching event for anyone present without the preacher having gone through the joyful hard work, the agony and the ecstasy, of preparing her own sermon.

[¶37] **A moment of joyful theological discovery or exciting spiritual revelation for the preacher during sermon preparation is necessary for there to be such a moment for the congregation during the preaching, and such moments during sermon preparation also contribute to keeping the minister’s own faith experience alive and well.**

Mitchell 1990, 119-122, 131-133, discusses the note of joyful celebration in the worship and preaching tradition of the Black church, an emotional climate that is not likely to be evoked and sustained by preachers who “borrow” their sermons from others or by preachers who simply read aloud to the congregation their own precisely written manuscripts. Craddock 2010, 23-24, holds that the most powerful spiritual exercise for maintaining the vitality of one’s own faith perspective is the discipline of preparing and delivering one’s own sermons, and that “no stronger argument against the habit of preaching the sermons of others has ever been mounted.” And, 102, he characterizes shortcuts such as using someone else’s sermon as trying “to walk away with the blessing without wrestling with the angel” (Genesis 32:24-29). And in 2011, 191-192, he insists that the absence of authentic passion when performing (it is not preaching)

someone else's sermon, even if credit is given, is more important than the issue of plagiarism: "How can you eat off of someone else's plate and be passionate about the meal?" Barbara Brown Taylor 2001, 157, notes that she holds out for a moment of revelation or illumination during sermon preparation, because if there is no sense of discovery for her, then there won't be one for the congregation either. Lischer 2001, "ix" (Preface – pages not numbered) writes of a moment of theological insight when the preacher discovers the brilliant witness to Jesus Christ in a text in order to hold the text up before the congregation and turn it in such a way that they too discover the text's brilliant witness to Jesus Christ. Lowry 1997, 54-55, suggests that during sermon preparation one clue as to whether the sermon contains a spark of revelation or theological insight that will help it to "fly" in the preaching is whether we find ourselves searching for stuff to add or we find ourselves looking for ways to cut something out (the latter is the better sign). Further, 76, when discussing the sudden shift in a plotted sermon, he makes a distinction between the words revelation and discovery, noting that "Unlike the term *discovery*, *revelation* by definition includes a sense of apparent discontinuity. It (revelation) happens, after which everything takes on new meaning." And I would add that, ordinarily, discovery has the connotation of something we do whether intentionally or not, and revelation has the connotation of something that happens to us, whether invited or not. And Lowry suggests that it is the revelation of a discontinuity that likely indicates the sudden plot shift may be an appropriate feature of the shape of the sermon in the making, and cautions against trying to make any sermon shape fit all texts and all preaching occasions. Consider H. Richard Niebuhr's 1975, 68-69, analogy in Chapter III "Reasons of the Heart" of the moment of revelation at a passage in reading a book of complex argument that clarifies or illuminates everything that went before it and everything that comes after it. That example of a clarifying moment and passage in reading a

book is an appropriate parallel to the moment of clarity or insight in the process of sermon preparation. However, Diogenes Allen 1989, 228-229, observes in n.1 of *Chapter Eight*: “Reason and Revelation” that in the matter of studying the nature of revelation in the theology of biblical Christianity, the studies of Foster and Farrer, described in that note, “are a far better place to start...than the much better known work by H. Richard Niebuhr...” Allen goes on in that chapter 149-164, with an extensive discussion of revelation and reason as understood in various voices of Greek philosophy and as seen in the context of the Bible.² Bultmann 1957, 66-67, discusses Kant’s rationalizing, secularizing, and reducing to general ethics the Christian view of revelation through the history of Israel and the New Testament accounts of Jesus. As to the subjective experience of revelation reflected in the comments of Barbara Brown Taylor and Richard Lischer in relation to the process of sermon preparation, consider Tillich’s 1957, 78-79, definition of subjective revelation as “the experience in which an ultimate concern grasps the human mind and creates a community in which this concern expresses itself in symbols of action, imagination and thought.” And consider Fant’s 1975, 35, discussion of Bonhoeffer’s view of present revelation through the presence of Christ in the proclamation that takes place in the community of faith.

[¶38] **Preaching from the sermon work of others is a way of self-destruction for a person called to preach, and can suck the vitality out of a congregation, especially a parish that is not strong and healthy enough to host a parasite in the pulpit for a time and still survive and recover under honest leadership at some point in the future.**

J. H. Jowett is cited in Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 298: “Men ought to prepare and preach their own sermons. You will find that the freshness of your own originality will give new flavor and zest to the feast which you set before your people.” One may infer from that laconically

proffered advice that performing the sermons of others was not an uncommon practice when Jowett wrote. And that is tragic. The way of trying to preach from the sermons of others leads to homiletic self-destruction. If a preacher is a well trained and well practiced actor, she might be able to do an almost passable job of using someone else's sermon outline, but such preaching will never come to life like preaching from one's own work. Such a play-acting (literally: hypocritical!) preacher will become, in the words of Augustine, "an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly," as quoted in the Vatican II document "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" Paragraph 25, which can be seen in Abbott 1966, 127. This is also cited in Stott 1982, 44-45. It is obviously impossible to preach with a genuine sense of place and rootedness, as Saldine 2011 recommends, if the preacher is not doing his or her own work. On the other hand, Lischer 1988, 74, suggests to me that the language of a cultural place such as a particular congregation has the potential of sealing off the church from the rest of the community, "which also belongs to God." Nevertheless, let the preacher prepare her own sermons in the place where she lives and preaches. A theological education is a terrible thing to waste! Regular dependence on the sermon work of others has even led some pastors into the reprehensible practice of reading canned sermons, slightly adapted, to their congregations while pretending to preach their own sermons, even claiming as their own personal experience examples and illustrations found in another's sermon. After a preacher who has never been seen attending the symphony concert or any other local cultural event and is known never to have participated in bridge, chess, or square-dancing uses illustrations from these venues on several occasions as if from his or her own experience, one may justly begin to wonder whose sermons she or he is performing (not preaching). Such a person has abandoned the call of God, violated the trust of God's church, and committed both larceny and fraud by stealing the work of others

and putting it out as one's own (false) witness, or in a biblical tell-it-as-it-is metaphor, soiled his or her preaching clothes (Revelation 2:4).

[¶39] **It is no sin for persons to revisit their calling to ministry and their discernment as to which variety of service might provide the career path where their particular gifts can be most beneficially and honestly employed.**

Persons who have been ordained and installed as pastors of churches and who have the responsibility of proclaiming God's word in preaching at Lord's Day services should make it their first and highest priority, except for interruptions by serious personal, family, or pastoral emergencies, in their work day to do the study necessary for the preparation of their own sermons. If this priority is honored, all the other pastoral responsibilities, from visitation, to organizational leadership, to community involvement, will go better. The minister who cannot honor this priority should seek spiritual discernment and possibly transfer to a form of ministry that does not include preaching responsibilities. This of course involves a reassessment of one's subjective or inward sense of calling from God which Bonhoeffer 1975, 135-136, discusses in relation to the external call of the church. He discusses important aspects of a sure and certain sense of calling from God including humility and love for the people and the work of preaching. Bonhoeffer, 134, also discusses a distinction in the Lutheran tradition in which ordination is to the preaching ministry rather than to a pastoral ministry. Bonhoeffer was only partially correct when he wrote of "The Reformed" (aka the Always-Being-Reformed-by-the-Word-of-God) "church concept in which a person is ordained to the pastorate of a particular congregation." Rather, a person is ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament with an approved call to one's first pastoral assignment being a prerequisite, but one is to be installed not "reordained" in successive pastoral assignments, aka calls. A different distinction seems to apply in some

Protestant traditions to the effect that a person may not be ordained as a minister of word and sacrament with the intention of using his or her theological training in an academic career rather than a pastoral one. But, in practice, most Christian traditions, aka denominations, allow for ordained ministers or licensed preachers, aka certified pastors, to serve on church staffs or in schools or administrative structures with job descriptions that do not include regular preaching and sacramental or pastoral responsibilities. I have noticed in the staff listings of several congregations of the Churches of Christ (sometimes referred to as part of restoration churches, as in sincere commitment to restoring the practices and teachings of the churches today to the model represented in the New Testament writings) that the first position is “Preaching Minister,” followed by “Youth Minister,” “Education Minister,” “Music Minister,” and such like. The important matter here is that in every Christian tradition the minister who has the regular preaching responsibility should prepare his or her own sermons and must studiously avoid becoming dependent on “sermon helps” or other peoples’ sermon preparation work. Not only are there “varieties of gifts but the same Spirit” but there are also “varieties of services but the same Lord” (I Cor. 12:4-5). Let each minister serve in the work for which he or she has the necessary gifts and is also willing to devote the necessary discipline. The congregation of a plagiarizing or fraudulent preacher might not be able to discern or articulate the source of the problem that afflicts and debilitates and troubles their church, but they will inevitably begin to feel that something is missing from the dynamics of the preaching event. As Long 2005, 232, observes: “If we are faithfully exercising our ministry of preaching, if we are honestly bearing witness to the gospel, for and with people whom we love, over time it will show. If we are fundamentally bored by what we are doing, feel contempt for or superior to the hearers, are cynical toward what we are preaching, try to be impressive or charming, or wish we were in some other vocation, that

will also show.” Bonhoeffer 1975, 130, 176-177, goes on at some length about a problem of post preaching self-doubt and discomfort that may beset some pastors on Sunday afternoons and evenings. He suggests that some may be helped by a feed-back group that joins the pastor in unpacking the preaching event, to help the preacher assess whether “God’s Word (Jesus Christ!) was given a place in the sermon,” and to help the pastor regain a sense of assurance “that Christ enters the congregation through (the) words that he (or she) proclaims from the Scripture.” Bonhoeffer insists that “the sermon should not leave the preacher despairing and perplexed, but rather it should make him (or her) joyful and certain.” Yet he is at the same time clearly on guard against self-satisfaction in pastors—settling for mediocrity by taking too much comfort in Luther’s words of assurance, “You have done your work, leave and go and get your glass of beer and let the Word of God take its free course: God will care for that.” Such assurances and remedies are small comfort to the pastor who persists in using the work of others rather than doing her own. Luther’s “You have done your work” should ring hollow to such a one.

[¶40] **Here are references to some practical guidelines and cautions for preachers in the matter of sharing personal experiences and relating incidents that involve actual people such as family members, friends, neighbors, or associates.**

Barbara Brown Taylor 2001, 159-162, has a useful discussion of the aspects of self-expression and self-revelation that have to do with both the physical aspects of sermon delivery and with what one shares in a sermon by way of personal experiences. Buttrick 1987, 141-143, discusses the wisdom of generalizing for anonymity when sharing anecdotes involving one’s personal experiences, one’s family members, or people known to the present company. Ronald Allen 1998, 216-217, has careful guidance on relating any stories from the preacher’s own experience in which he mentions certain cautions given by Buttrick, Craddock, and Wilson. Barth 1991,

129, acknowledges the importance of down-to-earth language in preaching, but he cautions against being too casual or nonchalant, and against the undisciplined use of images and parallels and the relating of personal experiences, especially any reports that intrude into the lives of listeners. Haddon Robinson 2001, 154-158, has useful cautions about ministers exaggerating the wit or exploits of their own children in sermon illustrations and relating others' stories as if they happened to oneself; and suggests it is better to relate a hypothetical illustration as a fiction rather than to claim it as an experience. Wilson, 2007, 110, acknowledges the necessity of fictionalizing in good story telling but emphasizes the fiction must always be used in the service of truth, and he asserts: "The preacher must never lie, claim something as fact that is fictional, say that something was a personal experience that was not, or disclose something that was told in confidence" (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 64]). Borg 2003, 51, mentions Garrison Keillor's creatively spun yarns of "The News from Lake Wobegon" on the *Prairie Home Companion* radio program as an example of truth communicated through fiction (also cited in Chapter IV, [¶ 64]). The practice of communicating truth through fictionalized accounts of real happenings or practices in various human endeavors is well exemplified in the parables of Jesus and in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' own activities, as is noted in Borg 2001, 206, where he is explaining what he means by metaphorical narrative and where he cites Crossan 2000. Borg 2003, 51, also notes an important distinction between purely creative story telling about the universal truths of life and the metaphorical content of the Bible since "the Bible is the product of a thousand years of community experience" and "there is history in the Bible." Craddock 2010, 163, mentions the danger of creating a fictional example that is too obviously contrived and too general to have much force.

[¶41] **When it comes to using "borrowed" material as if it is one's own**

creation or experience, the preacher knows his or her own dishonesty and emptiness – or maybe not.

Cynthia Campbell 2012, 10-14, discusses using sources ethically which includes acknowledgement of dependence when preaching and specific attribution when publishing in print or online. When dependence on prepackaged resources is not acknowledged, the lack of integrity between the sermon content and the sermon delivery will surely deprive the people of the vital preaching experience that God wants them to have. A true preacher develops his or her own sermons. Ronald Allen 1998, 256, makes allowance for the occasional use of a whole sermon by another preacher if one acknowledges the source of the sermon. But his previous discussion, 221-237, of “Embodying the Sermon,” getting the sermon from the preacher’s mind or from his or her notes into the preacher’s body and heart in preparation for the preaching moment, describes work that simply cannot be done on the basis of “sermon preparation” that uses someone else’s sermon notes or manuscript. Mitchell 1990, 34-38, discusses “The Power of Black Preaching Through the Years” and relates how his dramatic reading at the end of a university lecture of a third hand account of a famous 19th century sermon by a Black slave preacher received such a strong and positive response that some prison trustees in the audience (they were out of prison on supervised leave for the event) insisted that he come and “preach” that message at the facility of their incarceration. Mitchell is careful to call this performance a dramatic reading and to put quote marks around the word “preach” in reporting the request of the prisoners. It becomes clear in Mitchell’s discussion of “Training for Black Preachers Through the Years” (Chapter 3) and “Toward a Theology of Black Preaching” (Chapter 9) that Mitchell does not in any sense or even to a small degree allow for a dramatic reading of someone else’s sermon to substitute for preaching one’s own sermon. And while I have asserted that using other

people's sermon work is inexcusable in someone blessed with a theological education, I agree with Mitchell, 54-55, that formal education, while important, has its limitations. Other elements, including the influence of family and faith community, inherent personal gifts, and role models, are primary channels through which God calls, develops, inspires, and sustains preachers who are anointed (Forbes 1989) or Spirit-filled (Luther in his German Mass, referenced in the next paragraph). So, while I do not agree that "occasional" use of someone else's sermon is okay, I do make allowance for a possible emergency situation when no pinch hitter, such as a pastoral staff colleague, a local lay preacher, or a supply preacher, is available, and I suggest a form of explanation and attribution at the end of the next paragraph. The public reader of someone else's sermons is not a preacher but a play actor, perhaps even a good actor. The word that Jesus used for those who play-act at religion is hypocrite (from Greek: *hypocrites* = actor). Someone who play-acts at Christian preaching is a fake and a fraud. A public reading of a canned sermon is not preaching. And what if a preacher has chosen to deliver the mediocre, theologically frail, sub-Christian published sermons of a commercial personality cult leader without announcing credit to the source, and he does not deliver them well? A number of those entrepreneurial mega-church preachers actually offer downloadable sermon subscription services for their online followers who like to read their sermons devotionally or even assemble small groups to listen and engage in so-called theological discussions. Unfortunately, these subscription services are also available to preachers who do not do their own sermon preparation. I am reminded of the citation in Blackwood 1946, 152, of a woman who said to her pastor one Sunday, "You read your sermon, you did not read it well, and it was not worth reading."

[¶42] **It is important to remember and honor the fact that nowadays, the historical use of published sermons by untrained clergy and lay leaders**

notwithstanding, the occasions when a preacher might with honesty, openness, integrity, and apologies, recite someone else's sermon with proper attribution are truly rare.

A presentation such as the one described by the departing congregant in Blackwood's reference at the end of the above paragraph, if done by a person *not* called, educated, trained and licensed or ordained as a minister of God's word, might be acceptable, or at least forgivable, in a time and place where no preacher is available, so long as the reader gives credit to the writer and does not claim to be preaching. There is a shortage of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament in some denominations at the present time and many pulpits are being supplied by people briefly trained as "Certified Pastors" formerly known as "Licensed Lay Preachers;" and some of them are serving quite ably, honestly, and faithfully while acknowledging their dependence on tertiary or predigested resources. That was also a frequently used expedient during the Middle Ages when there was a general shortage of capable and trained preachers. There were books of postils—short homilies—on the Gospel or Epistle passages of the day called homilaria that were circulated for use in worship services by lay readers or undereducated priests. Some of those homilaria are discussed in Edwards 2004, 158-165, 182, and Old 1999, *passim*. Old 2004, 372, tells of one such homilium published in the Romanian Orthodox church in the 17th century called *Margarita* or *The Pearls*, a collection of historic sermons by Greek church spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, including John Chrysostom. Brilioth 1965a, 122, notes that a rubric in Luther's German Mass makes this allowance: "since preachers full of the Spirit are few," a homily may be read in place of the sermon. Thompson 1971, 104, 132, reports Luther's fuller explanation of this provision. Maxwell 1949, 146, notes that a similar provision is made in the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549: "Communion was to be celebrated at least every Sunday and Holy Day, at which times also a sermon was to be preached or a homily read;" (also

referenced in Thompson 1971, 272). I have also cited these examples in Chapter IV [¶ 17].

Thompson 1971, 228, notes that in July of 1547, after Edward VI, a precocious boy of 10, came to the English throne, the first *Book of Homilies* appeared, and the liturgical reforms instituted by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer required that one of the homilies be read at Sunday services in each parish, a move that was intended to raise the standard of sermons! The general state of preaching must have been at very low ebb indeed. Thompson 1971, 392, notes that Richard Baxter, the English Puritan liturgiologist on the radical right of the English Reformation, in *The Savoy Liturgy*, appealed to “the liberty expressed in the Admonition before the *Second Book of Homilies*.” Yet, the description that follows in the same place of how the minister in the pulpit shall pray and preach does not leave any wiggle room for reading a canned sermon. Perhaps the aforementioned liberty was the liberty to preach one’s own sermon in addition to or rather than reading a homily from the book. But such a performance by one called by God to preach, filled with the Spirit, trained and ordained to the service of the Word, is inexcusable, except perhaps on extreme occasions when the expedient of reading another’s sermon should be acknowledged at the outset with the reason given and apologies made. If such an expedient is repeated or becomes occasional, a serious problem exists. As a famous politician challenging an incumbent for his office once said, “It’s okay to fire a nice guy if he is not able to do his job.” The fake preacher knows what the source of the problem is and, therefore, should be pitied because of the misery that he has brought upon himself and others. He surely must be suffering from some kind of deep, personal spiritual crisis. Perhaps we can only pray that the Spirit of God will restore his spirit and lead him to reorient priorities in his budgeting of personal prayer time and general study and sermon preparation time. But rather than get him transferred to inflict his emptiness on another community, perhaps his overseers or some local church leaders could get him to seek

and obtain the spiritual counsel and rehabilitation that he so desperately needs. Preaching effectively and with personal integrity is exhilarating, hard, and time-consuming work. Priority must be given to preparation. On occasions when events beyond the preacher's control, or his own lapse of discipline, make sermon borrowing necessary, let him be up front about it: "Due to _____, my sermon today is based on the outline of a very fine sermon written by _____;" or: "I have practiced to do the best job I can of reading to you a sermon written by _____."

[¶43] **It is seldom necessary to change the principal reading of the day from the one in the lectionary in order to make preaching responsive and relevant to the current needs and situations in God's church and world. Some catastrophic world or local or church-family events might justify a more appropriate text than the assigned one, but not necessarily.**

When a preacher who uses a lectionary is well informed and thoughtful about current events, needs and issues, including spirituality and non-canonical text fads in church and world, and also serious and disciplined about theological reading, scriptural exegesis, liturgical theology, pastoral visiting, and her own personal spirituality, there seems to be an invisible hand that provides a scriptural opportunity at just the right time to address divergent persuasions and current needs and issues while expounding the words of canonical scripture responsibly. That scriptural opportunity will often turn up at or near the current place in the preacher's lectionary whether *lectio selecta de tempore* or *lectio continua de scriptura*. If lectionaries help preachers to be responsible with respect to "the whole counsel of God," rather than narrow their scriptural texts and subjects to their own pre-existing familiarities and preoccupations, as I have mentioned in Chapter I, "Canon and Communal Faith History," [¶ 22] the lectionary approach will also provide the preacher with the best opportunities to preach on public issues that the preacher might already feel obliged to

address. In fact, while he was not talking about preaching from a lectionary, it was in his fourth Beecher lecture, “Preaching the Whole Counsel of God,” that Gardner C. Taylor 1977, 82-89, spoke on the importance of preaching judgment with regard to national and social sins and ills. He notes, following George Buttrick and Vernon Johns, that it was the sin of racism which first brought Jesus into conflict with his own people at the synagogue in Nazareth, that occasion when as providence and the Hebrew lectionary would have it “the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him” (Luke 4:17). The preacher who fails to even mention the pervasiveness of systemic racism all around the globe of earth in the twenty-first or any century when he or she comes to Luke 4:16-30 on the third and fourth Sundays after the Feast of Epiphany, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary, has grotesquely missed his or her opportunity and responsibility, unless, perhaps, it is more urgent under the circumstances to deal with the present threat of a rising authoritarian and/or populist and/or blind nationalism, not that the issues of systemic racism and authoritarian nationalism are discretely separable. Oh dear! How much more pleasant it would be to talk with faux self-effacement about our own hometown’s or home church’s amazement and skepticism toward this homegrown preacher! It was also in his lecture on “Preaching the Whole Counsel of God” that Gardner C. Taylor 1977, 86-87, had this amazing paragraph:

Along this line, in my own beloved and rambling Borough of Brooklyn there is in our Civic Center, in the heart of it, a monument to a tremendous life. The monument shows the likeness of a stocky, barrel-chested man with a broad face and great shoulders. The figure wears a cape and at the base of the statue are the figures of young girls whose facial features suggest that they are black children. The large likeness is that of Henry Ward Beecher, first lecturer in this series, whose far-sounding voice rose from Brooklyn Heights and echoed around the world in the cause of human freedom and in opposition to the foul institution of slavery whose stench still sickens the nation a hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Significantly, the monument faces Borough Hall, the seat of government with Beecher’s hand outstretched as if delivering to the majesty of government the will of the higher majesty of God. To be relevant to that moment in time and to that point in history in which each preacher speaks, he (or she) must throw the searchlight of his (or her) gospel of judgment and mercy upon the corporate arrangements of the society which are wrought by individuals and which in turn affect so vitally the

quality of life available to each individual.

[¶44] **The biblical creation narrative’s assertion that all humankind is created as a reflection or image of God, along with the preaching of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, makes clear that a major responsibility of all preachers is to address the word of God to current issues of social ethics—justice, equity, and compassion in societal structures—in God’s church and God’s world as well as matters of personal morality and religious duty.**

Massey 1974, 45, was not writing about preaching from any kind of lectionary or system of assigned texts but about “a responsible self” and the rationalizations of many churchmen for failing to address current moral and social issues in their preaching when he pointed out that: “All along, however, the black preacher has been insisting that the secular aspects of life are moral at their center and that the concern for human rights and decent treatment is no side-issue but an understood implication of the biblical anthropology that declares every man as made ‘in the image of God’” (also cited above [¶ 3]). The title of Massey’s 1974 book *The Responsible Pulpit* is, thus, a reference not only to the preacher’s responsibility to Christ, the Bible, the church, and the preacher’s own integrated selfhood, but also responsiveness to the biblical faith’s call for justice in society. Bonhoeffer 1972, 1-17, in his 1943 reckoning after 10 years of Hitler and the 3rd Reich begins to address the question as to what ethical word or principle may guide the Christian person who stands fast under the stress of the volatile circumstances of that time and place by considering and dismissing in turn as ineffectual, weak, and futile: *reasonableness*, *fanaticism*, *conscience*, *duty*, *freedom*, and *virtuousness*. He then lights on *responsibility*. And, of course, he goes thoroughly into the matter of responsible action in his *Ethics* (1975 [1955]). Willimon, cited above on Augustine’s crediting of divine foreknowledge in providing just the right appointed text for a current situation, explains in 2005, Chapter Six, “The Political Word,”

that preaching the Gospel is always controversial, always calls for change in people and their communities, is always uncomfortable, always tends toward conversion. Yet he notes, 94, that while preaching inevitably has political ramifications, it should not usually endorse partisan policies or be ideological. I have not encountered any such cautionary circumscription of social/political speech in the pulpit among the Black homiletic theologians that I have read; but they do focus mainly on biblical perspectives and practices exemplified in the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Here is another luminous statement quoted by Mitchell 1990, 48, of James Poindexter who preceded Mitchell's grandfather as pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Columbus Ohio in the post-Civil War period:

Nor can a preacher more than any other citizen plead his religious work or the sacredness of that work as an exemption from duty. Going to the Bible to learn the relation of the pulpit to politics, and accepting the prophets, Christ, and the apostles, and the pulpit of their times, and their precepts and examples as the guide of the pulpit of today, I think that their conclusion will be wherever there is a sin to be rebuked, no matter by whom committed, . . . or good to be achieved by our country or mankind, there is a place for the pulpit to make itself felt and heard. The truth is, all the help the preachers and all other good and worthy citizens can give by taking hold of politics is needed in order to keep the government out of bad hands and secure the ends for which governments are formed. (as cited in Woodson 1921)

Bower 1987, 23-26, mentions the lectionary's seemingly providential supplying of the needful word in the needy time and situation. Craddock 2011, 127-136, suggests that a message that people need to hear with a "shock of recognition" followed by conviction will be best received as a message from an appointed text and in the setting of the familiar order of service (also cited in Book II, n.17 [¶ 3]). Several preachers and homiletic theologians have written on the importance of preaching pastorally and not merely confrontationally when addressing the scriptural message prophetically to some controversial public or personal issue. Examples can be seen in Neaves 1980, 111 ff., and in Willimon 1980 and works that he cites.

[¶45] **Ministers of God’s word are called upon to maintain in their preaching a careful balance between addressing the spiritual and moral conditions and needs of the individual persons in front of them and the ethical conditions and needs of the society around them.**

Wenig 2001, 86, tells of experiencing early in her rabbinate the reality of Barbara Lundblad’s observation that there are always *several* sacred texts in a worship service in addition to the prescribed readings: “the text of the liturgy, the text of people’s lives, the text of the community as a whole, and the text of history.” And Wenig testifies: “When I am fortunate or doing my job well, I find the intersection of these texts,” and “sometimes I don’t, and have to choose among them.” John Watson (1850-1907), aka Ian Maclaren, in his sermon “The Glory of the City,” reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, acknowledges, 31, a history of “two kinds of revivals—the spiritual, which deals with the individual, and the social, which regenerates the community,” and indicates that “we are now at the beginning of a social revival.” But his further discussion indicates that the two kinds of transformation cannot be completely separated. “It is needful that a man care for his own soul and enrich it with good things; he must remember also the multitudes at his doors who are laboring and heavy laden.” Similarly, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), famous for articulating the “social gospel,” sometimes thought to have made social transformation dominant over personal regeneration, actually wrote in a published article, reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 136:

Most Christians say: Wait until all men are converted, then a perfect social order will be possible. Most social reformers say: Wait till we have a perfect social order, then all men will be good. We say: Go at both simultaneously; neither is possible without the other. They all say: Wait! We say: Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!

Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 183, remark on the combination of evangelistic zeal and emphasis on social concern and action in the preaching of James Stewart, (1896-1990). Old 2010 (volume 7), 103, 106, remarks on Earl Palmer’s (1931-) consistent discussion of major theological and

social issues of the day in his process of systematic interpretation of the scripture texts in his *lectio continua de scriptura* sermon series on various books of the Bible.

[¶46] **The theological thinking muscle that is used in sermon development can be kept in fit condition by a multi-week schedule of sermon preparation and by a daily routine of theological reading.**

The preacher is much more likely to recognize opportunities in scriptural texts for dealing with emergent issues if her wrestling with text and commentaries for a particular sermon is spread over three or more weeks rather than crammed into one, and if she also has a daily discipline of serious theological and other reading outside of the Scriptural disciplines. Neaves 1980, 111, discusses the importance and potential of expanding one's reading habits. Fant and Pinson 1995 VI, 245, have extensive reports from Alexander Whyte (1836-1921) on how essential his habit of general theological reading was to his preaching work. The daily discipline and sheer pleasure of theological reading—try it, you'll like it—is important because, as Lischer 2001, 1, indicates, sermon speech should emerge from and rearticulate the organizing principle of the church's life, its theology. Lischer, 6-7, cites Gerhard Ebeling, P. T. Forsythe, and Philip Melancthon in reminding us preachers that it is impossible to go directly from text to sermon because the church has one doctrine, i.e., official teaching, through which all texts must be interpreted for purposes of preaching, the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, the doctrine of grace. Lischer, 14-15, describes a reciprocal relationship under the heading "Preaching as Theology," which I reference more fully in Chapter IV [¶ 70]. And following his discussion of "The Correlation of Law and Gospel," 41-43, Lischer lists "Seven Confusions of Law and Gospel," 43-47, examples of the sort of theological confusion that can easily pollute our Scriptural exegesis and our preaching when we fail to continually balance our daily Scriptural study with wider theological reading. Lischer

certainly makes a cogent and helpful case for the integral relationship between theology and preaching; but his complaint, 2001, Preface and 1988, 66-69 (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 68]), that contemporary homileticians seem to have forgotten that theology is preaching and preaching is theology, except of course for himself, is not convincing. Barth 1991, 106, notes that the preacher's grasp of the historical and current theological teachings and traditions of his or her particular church is necessary to keep the pastor mindful of and responsive to the fact that "preaching takes place in a very specific church at a very specific time" (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 70]). Wilson 2007, 214, asserts that "All thinking and speaking of God is theology." And that, he says, includes "the speaking of God that we do in the pulpit or, for that matter, at the dinner table." And, 213, he explains the reciprocal or catalytic relationship between sermon preparation and a regular discipline of reading in systematic or constructive theology, a discipline that, according to Wilson is not neglected by excellent preachers. And, 229-245, he discusses the uses of systematic/constructive theology in learning to think theologically in sermon preparation, and he also discusses ways to strengthen sermons by appropriately incorporating basic Christian teachings (doctrines) that are relevant to the preaching text and situation, with special mention of relating particular doctrines to certain days and seasons in the liturgical calendar. My own experience is that, practically speaking, it is important to devote an hour to general theological reading early in each sermon workshop day, preferably before entering the sermon workshop where wrestling with text and commentaries will dominate, for the purpose of getting the theological thinking muscle warmed up for the all-day work of theological sorting and sifting so that Scripture study and all of the day's reading and other tasks and encounters can be more productive and so that knowledge and experience that have been previously banked in the mind can be called up and withdrawn from the bank for use.

[¶47] **A pleasant daily discipline of serious theological reading and other reading apart from study targeted to the sermon work at hand can help to free and activate the preacher’s mind for discovering the needed connections between his targeted textual study and sermon work and the cultural/theological setting and human situation of his or her preaching assignment.**

For all of the progress that has been made in the direction of narrative theology, narrative hermeneutics, and narrative homiletics since the reflections of G. Ernest Wright 1952 and others in the biblical theology movement, and how much the observations and perspectives of biblical-theology-as-recital have been incorporated in recent biblical commentaries, theological dissertations and homiletic writings, the fact remains that, as Wright, 31, wrote, “the problem is still acute as to how the historical (narrative) and systematic approaches are to be combined.” My response, for now, is that the two approaches are not to be combined in any definitive or fixed way. Both approaches are necessary in biblical studies and in theological reflection. And both approaches are needed in the preacher’s everyday work of sermon development. The preacher must keep the two poles of confessional historic recital and systematic organization of ideas about God dancing in her or his head from day to day. That’s why I think that preachers should not take a strictly organic narrative way or a strictly structural discursive way in every sermon, perhaps not in any sermon. And that’s another reason why a daily time of reading in reflective theology quite apart from current work with scriptural texts and commentaries is so essential to the work of serious preaching. Lowry 1997, 66-67, 69-71, discusses the danger of “explanatory blight” in sermons heavy with critical exegesis and “fill in the blank” completion tests with propositional sermons (also referenced below [¶ 62]); and he suggests how biblical narrative exegesis and a narrative approach to preaching can help preachers to avoid such quagmires of biblical and theological factoids. And I would add that another aid to help preachers avoid such fact-spewing,

mind-befogging air pollution in the preaching moment is the above mentioned discipline of daily theological and wider general reading. Bonhoeffer 1975, 149, wrote in a supplement to one of his lectures on homiletics that “The preacher should not allow himself to be kept from regularly studying a large theological work, even if he only completes 4-5 pages a day.” Dargan 1912, 120, reports that an eminent preacher in the Reformed (aka “Reforming,” aka “Always-Being-Reformed-By-The-Word-Of-God”) tradition, Pierre Du Moulin, wrote to his two preacher sons encouraging them to develop a strong study life for their work of preaching since “God no longer conquers his enemies with the jawbone of an ass” (Judges 15:15). For some of us early morning people, an hour of serious reading before the morning physical workout or breakfast or carpool duties makes it more likely that flashes of creative insight about the sermons in development will come during various activities of the day. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 145, report that Gerald Kennedy (1907-1980) arose at 5:30 each day and read theology for two hours before starting his office work. You late night people will have to work out your own salvation in fear and trembling. It is not necessary that the preacher shall have read and experienced everything that might be useful. It is only necessary that she shall read seriously everyday so that her mind can work productively with what is before her and she can put to good use whatever she has read and experienced throughout her life. When the mind gets going in this way at the beginning of the day, one seldom has to research and document metaphors and illustrations since they are drawn from memory of past readings, auditions and viewings, and from personal experience.

[¶48] **Several seasoned preachers and homiletic theologians give sage advice on the best and most natural ways to improve sermon communication with images and illustrations drawn mainly from one’s own experience and observation and how to acknowledge the use of materials borrowed from others without the distraction of technical details and name dropping.**

Regarding references drawn from memory, one can give credit in a general way for borrowed ideas without specific citations that tend to hinder the flow of the preaching/hearing experience. Farmer 1942, 62-63, has suggestions for minimizing distraction in acknowledging indebtedness where he cautions against name dropping which is always a distraction in the preaching event. Keller 2015, 106-110, has the contrary suggestion that when preaching in the propositional mode, one may strengthen his theses by citing respected authorities. Davis 1958, 261-264; Buttrick 1987, 149-150; and Long 2005, 230 have practical suggestions on giving attribution for quotations and borrowings in such a way as not to clutter the air with publication details and thus undermining the power of oral communication. Cynthia Campbell 2012, 10, notes that preaching ethically requires full attribution of sources when sermons are published in print or online, while attribution in a preaching event might be a brief and general acknowledgement of indebtedness to avoid distraction from good oral communication due to cumbersome details. Craddock 2010, 206-207, has practical suggestions for acknowledging indebtedness for the use of materials “contributed” by another, with an unsubtle reminder: *Thou Shalt not Steal*. In 2011, 57, he refers to brief and unobtrusive attributions as “oral footnotes.” There is an example of brief and non-detailed attribution in Fant and Pinson’s 1995, X, 307, reprint of Paul Sherer’s sermon “The Love that God Defines:” “... as Dietrich Bonhoeffer has pointed out somewhere, love does not define God: God defines love.” I think Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 301, erred when they mentioned as a weakness in Billy Graham’s sermon introductions that “sometimes he attempts to undergird the authority of his remarks by generalized quotations from unspecified authority figures—“a prominent scientist said to me...” Perhaps Graham should have given fuller attribution as a footnote when he published the transcript of that sermon, but his failure to do so is no basis for criticizing his vague attribution in the preaching moment. Hebrews 2:6 is a good example of

generic attribution or acknowledgement of indebtedness: “But someone has testified somewhere, ‘What are human beings that you are mindful of them, ...’” Could the writer of Hebrews have given chapter and verse? Maybe. But that would not have been an improvement. And one who keeps the thinking apparatus active by way of daily theological and broader reading, listening, viewing, and an active life, will rarely have to resort to the scrapbook or the file cabinet of clippings and jottings, much less the anthologies of canned subject matter illustrations. I think most homileticians agree that examples and illustrations drawn from one’s own experience in reading, viewing, hearing, observing, and living are generally the most effective. Lundblad 2001, 126 wrote, “One subway ride is worth twenty books of ‘Sure-Fire Sermon Illustrations.’” Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 273, report that “It is clear that Martyn Lloyd Jones does not labor to include illustrative material,” but note, rather, his unforced use of illustrations that arise out of his wrestling with a text, his wide reading and experience, and his keen observation and recall of the same. Craddock 2010, 204, observes that in contexts where illustrations are needed, such as complex sermon messages or arguments, illustrations are best not taken from books or collections of illustrations but from one’s own experience or observation or by creating an analog to fit the purpose. Similarly, with regard to having first-hand access to examples and illustrations from personal experience in everyday life, it is not necessary that a preacher be an avid golfer, gardener, needle worker, sports fan, jogger, body builder, lap swimmer, music performance lover, TV or movie watcher, community theatre member, fisher, cook, woodworker, or collector, etc. It is only necessary that she have one or two avocations or hobbies that are good for her body, mind, and spirit, and that she pursues joyfully. This promotional announcement is underwritten by your local Family YMCA.

[¶49] **The function of preaching in Christian worship can be distorted by a too narrow focus on setting the scene for celebrating the Eucharist to the neglect of preaching that addresses the gospel to the life of the world as it is.**

If the three-year lectionaries have been used by some preachers and homileticians as an excuse for a too narrow focus on Scriptural exegesis to the point of biblicism, i.e., a non-biblical failure to address the proclamation to contemporary issues of justice and social ethics, as Buttrick 1994 contends, the lectionary system has been used by others to lull themselves into a preoccupation with “liturgical preaching” defined too narrowly as preaching that invariably includes a specific reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper which is to follow, as if the Eucharist alone were the real heart of the Lord’s Day Service. References to this tendency and examples of it can be seen in Fuller 1957 and 1987, Skudlarek 1981 and 1991, Sloyan 1984, Horace T. Allen 1996, 22-23, von Allmen 1962, and Brilioth 1965a, 174. The focus on the Eucharist and the function of preaching in preparing for the service of the Lord’s Table stems from the well known practice of the churches from New Testament times forward of incorporating both teaching/preaching and the thankful meal in Lord’s Day services. That historic practice is documented or referenced by many historians and liturgical scholars, including Maxwell 1949 and Dix 1940. Phifer 1965, 40, sums up some of the various terminologies that have been used in naming the two parts of the Lord’s Day Service and which are favored by certain liturgiologists: synaxis and Eucharist (Dix), catechumens and faithful (Hardman), Word and Upper Room (Maxwell). Phifer could have mentioned Pulpit and Table (Hageman). Willimon prefers Word and Table. And, of course, if asked, all of these writers would surely acknowledge the *dual* foci of the Lord’s Day Service around both spoken word and sacramental word, and that the function of the sermon is larger than just setting the theological table for the Eucharist. Sloyan 1984, 17, mindful that “the Eucharist”

means “the Thanksgiving,” is very plainspoken about the poverty of both a service of Word (scripture and preaching) without Eucharist (thankful meal) and a service of Eucharist without Word: “The first says: You have examined all the reasons to express your thankfulness, but why bother? The second says: Be thankful blindly without considering in your heart why.” Fuller 1957, 25, is especially clear in articulating a twofold function of the homily or sermon in worship: (1) to show and proclaim the linkage between the principal scripture text of the day and the gospel that has previously transformed the lives of the believers, and (2) to announce and establish the linkage between that text-and-gospel and the liturgical action of the Eucharist (also cited by Skudlarek 1981, 43-44). Yet, as with other writers imbued with the “Catholic liturgical paradigm” (West 1997) it is the second focus that predominates in Fuller’s view of liturgical preaching. This leaning toward preaching as preparation for the Eucharist is only increased by Fuller’s assertion in 1987, 332-333, citing G. D. Kilpatrick and 1 Cor. 11:26, that the anamnesis—remembering—in the Eucharist is itself a proclamation of the gospel, even though he also makes clear that, in his view, the anamnesis—remembering and proclaiming—of the eucharistic service includes both the reading and preaching of scripture and the sharing of bread and cup, according to the tradition of the synagogue and the early Christian liturgy of Hippolytus.

[¶50] **Setting the table for the Eucharist, as one function of preaching, has been widely affirmed in both Catholic and Protestant traditions even though that function is not always reflected in sermons.**

Thompson 1971, 203, 205, indicates that Calvin’s communion prayers in “The Form of Church Prayers” at Geneva and Strassburg paraphrase Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:26, as “proclaim *the benefit* of His death.” Skudlarek 1981, 97, allows that the homily may prepare the worshipers for the Eucharist without mentioning it, but insists that, normally, there should be specific

reference in the homily to the sacrament being observed. Skudlarek 1981, 98, it seems to me, still harbors a remnant or vestige of the view that the Lord's Day service has a single or circular center in the Eucharist rather than the dual or elliptical foci of Word and Sacrament when he indicates that a homily based on the texts of the day might seem to be a foreign element in the liturgical service rather than an integral part of it if it doesn't mention the anticipated thankful meal. Brilioth 1965a, 174, cites the Genevan rite of 1542 on this narrow view of liturgical preaching, i.e., "On communion days, a prayer for worthy communion is to be included in the prayer for the church, and the sermon also is to refer to the communion." It is good that Catholics have been called upon by Vatican II (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 52 [seen in Abbott 1966 and Hoffman 1991] and Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Article 4 [seen in Abbott 1966]) to acknowledge that Sunday service with Eucharist and no sermon is incomplete. This and many other teachings that issued from the Second Vatican Ecumenical Conference in the 1960's are completely consistent with teachings issued by the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century. Thompson 1971, 192, provides a guide to Calvin's strong statements about the impossibility of an efficacious observance of the Lord's Supper without the preached word. Deiss 1976, 260, shows how word and Eucharist are united in the institution of the sacrament according to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: "The proclaimed word is so powerful that it creates the Eucharist... But the Eucharist in turn proclaims the word." Bonhoeffer 1975, 128-129, insists that a cultic act, such as the Eucharist, for example, cannot be proclamation in the strictest sense, at least not by itself. It may only be proclamation as an act of praise and thanksgiving for the spoken word proclamation of the Lord's death and resurrection until he comes. Yet, a requirement that the sermon include a specific word of transition to the Eucharist is not well founded even though, as explained in the next paragraph, some of the Protestant Reformers insisted on a communion exhortation and

instruction on communion Sundays either at the end of the sermon or after the great prayer before Communion.

[¶51] **Protestant liturgical and homiletic theologians in the 20th century were in full agreement with the Lutheran and Calvinist (except Zwingli, Bucer, & Co.) Reformers that the chief Sunday service of the Christian churches should include both the preached word and the shared bread and cup.**

Karl Barth's 1938, 211, assertion that Lord's Day worship with sermon and no Lord's Supper is only a torso of a full-bodied Christian service is actually an echo of what many of the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformers were calling for: both sermon and sacrament as integral to Christian Lord's Day gatherings. Barth's metaphor of "only a torso" would also be appropriate if applied to the converse situation of a predominantly eucharistic service in which preaching is either optional, minimized or missing, since without preaching the worship service as a recapitulation of salvation history and restoration of Christ as the head of the church body, according to von Allmen's 1965, 21-41, description of Christian worship, which I reference more fully below [¶84]. Incidentally, Bonhoeffer 1972, 219, used the same metaphor, torso, that Barth used for an attenuated Lord's Day service, when lamenting the attenuated cultural life of the 20th century, due to the fact that "the end of the eighteenth century saw the end of the 'polymath', and in the nineteenth century intensive education replaced extensive, so that towards the end of it the 'specialist' evolved; and by now everyone is just a technician, even in the arts... This means that our cultural life remains a torso." That along with Barth's usage points to the fact that when Barth and Bonhoeffer used the word torso it was already a conventional metaphor for "something that has been mutilated or left unfinished" (*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary – Eleventh Edition*, 2003 – definition 2). But I digress. The call of the Reformers and Barth for a full-bodied

Sunday worship service with both preaching and the Lord's Supper was echoed by many Protestant liturgical scholars in the 20th century, e.g., Brilioth 1965a, 37-40, McArthur 1958, 15-23, and Phifer 1965, 18-19. Von Allmen 1962, 9-10, 40-41, likens the dual witness of word and sacrament to the Old Testament requirement of two witnesses in criminal prosecutions, (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15), and we would add, on a more positive but logically tenuous note, Jesus' claim, according to John 8:17-18, that his testimony to himself and that of the Father satisfies the two witnesses rule. But as to liturgical preaching always being shaped as a lead-in to the sacrament, von Allmen 1962, 33, insists the sermon and other elements in the liturgy should be complementary and that if adjustments must be made the prayers and other liturgical texts and actions should be adapted to the scripture and sermon rather than vice versa. But, in a more balanced vein, von Allmen, 40, sums up that since God has chosen to communicate the grace of his word to us chiefly through the sermon and the sacrament we should stifle our curiosity as to which is more loaded with grace. Bonhoeffer 1975, 175-176, in the eleventh and final of his 1930's lectures on homiletics, indicates that the pastor who is earnest about the preaching ministry may inevitably experience a psychological restlessness and self-questioning when the sermon ends and may be in need of pastoral care. Did the Word of God go out from the sermon and make its way among the congregation or did something about the sermon hinder the movement of the Word among the people? And he indicates that this need may be partially met or reduced by the grace of presiding at the Table of the Lord's Supper following the sermon, so that the Word made visible, tactile, and tasty in bread and cup has the pastor and congregation in mutual ministry to the post sermon pastoral needs of each and all. And Bonhoeffer concludes: "It is a real shame that this Supper continues to be the exception in the services of our (Protestant) churches. Our anxiety after the sermon would otherwise be very easy to allay. Von Allmen 1962,

41, goes on at some length about the barrenness and near sterility of sermon without sacrament and sacrament without sermon. Unfortunately, that part of the Reformers' vision is still honored mainly in the breach in many Protestant communities. Barth 1938, 190, asserts that the Reformers saw worship first in terms of the sacraments and that the focus on worship as mainly a preaching service is a later departure. The popular impression that the Protestant Reformers mainly favored Sunday worship as a bare preaching service has been partly fostered by historians frequently mentioning Luther's focus on the primacy of the Word in the restoration of Christian worship while giving less notice to Luther's conservative efforts to constrain or ward off the excesses of some of his enthusiastic compatriots. Luther gives evidence of his caution and moderation in this regard in the opening paragraph of his *Formula Missae* which can be seen in Thompson 1971, 98-107.

[¶52] **While the Protestant liturgical scholars and homiletic theologians of the 20th century were largely in agreement with the Reformers and with the Catholic tradition that the Lord's Supper should be an integral element of Sunday worship, the history of Protestant worship since the time of the Reformation reflects a wide variety of viewpoints and practices between the sermon as interpreter of the Lord's Supper whenever that ritual meal is included in worship services and the sacrament as the essential seal of the preached word, but most commonly some practice and perspective that has unarticulated elements of both of those two viewpoints and practices.**

Thompson 1971, 185, notes that while John Calvin renounced the Roman rite—the Mass—in categorical terms, having no personal attachment to it because, unlike Luther, he had never served as a priest himself, his own first efforts, in the *Institutes* of 1536, Ch. IV, to reconstruct the pattern of Sunday worship based on Scripture and the practices of the early church, favored weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. And it is well documented that the Geneva council blocked his

intention of frequent Communion, and, in particular, celebrating the resurrection feast with bread and wine on Easter Sunday. It seems that, contrary to the intentions of Martin Luther and John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli's reduction of the Lord's Supper to a memorial observed but four times each year (Thompson 1971, 143) and Martin Bucer's insistence that "the preaching of the word is the constitutive act of divine worship" (Thompson 1971, 162) became the dominant perspective in most Protestant denominations other than Lutheran and Anglican related churches. Phifer 1965, Chapters 6-10, chronicles the devolution of Protestant worship to a simple liturgy of preaching, singing, and praying and gives a brief summary on p. 109. Horace T. Allen 1996, 1, notes that contemporary worship books and directories for worship of the denominations signal a restoration of the historically normative weekly celebration of both word and sacrament on the Lord's Day and, 19-20, he specifies the justification and rationale for the restoration of this two-foci or "elliptical" configuration of the liturgy. Phifer 1965, 125, credits not only recent studies in the history of Christian worship but also modern biblical studies with an increased awareness of the unity of word and sacrament. And Horace T. Allen 1996, 13, contrary to Fuller 1987 and 1957 and Skudlarek 1981, sees catechesis (information and instruction) as an important function of lectionary preaching. But if the pastor preaches with awareness that she is mainly addressing the already converted, always in need of reconversion and building up in God's word, as Fuller 1957, von Allmen 1962, and Skudlarek 1981 acknowledge, and that both sermon and sacrament are integral to a full-bodied Lord's Day service, must she always direct her remarks toward the Eucharist? I answer no. The mutual complementarity of word and sacrament will be manifest when both are regularly present in the Lord's Day service whether the Eucharist is mentioned or alluded to in the sermon or not so long as both are part of a well ordered and well conducted liturgy. Doan 1980, 99, discusses a broad and balanced approach to when, how often, and how

much to use the sermon as an occasion to specifically mention or highlight aspects of the worship service, including the sacraments. The eucharistic context that Horace T. Allen 1983b, especially p. 16, sees reflected throughout the structure of the lectionary need not always be uppermost in the minds of preachers as they prepare sermons. Deiss 1992, 83, uses a similar line of reasoning when discussing the historic inclusion or not of the words of institution from First Corinthians, Chapter Eleven, in the eucharistic prayer. Thompson 1971, 165, indicates that in Martin Bucer's Strassburg liturgy the Great Prayer, without the words of institution, replaced the canon of the Mass (canon being, in liturgical usage, according to Davies 1986, a word, with a long and evolving history, referring to the requisite prayers of the eucharistic service) always included the words of institution, and the words of institution were recited by the minister as the scriptural warrant for the celebration of the Supper directly after the Lord's Prayer. The separation of the words of institution from the great prayer of thanksgiving became the common practice in many Protestant communities. Old 1998b, 317-325, indicates that the idea of "liturgical preaching" or preaching as mystagogy, that is, preaching directed to explanation of the Christian mysteries, that is, the Christian rites or sacraments, especially baptism and the Lord's Supper, arose in the time of Ambrose of Milan (4th century) and was a reversal of the earlier idea of the sacraments as a seal of the preached word, the concept that was reverted to by the Protestant reformers.

[¶53] **Conversation among Catholic and Protestant people and leadership around the integrity of preaching and the Lord's Supper in Christian worship prior to and following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965) have led to important changes, most especially in perspectives and practices around preaching in the Catholic churches embracing some of the historic emphases and practices of the Protestant churches and around the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Protestant churches embracing some of the historic perspectives and practices of the Catholic churches.**

While the Reformers did not think that the sermon should necessarily always reference the service of the table, they did insist on instruction and exhortation for communion either at the end of the sermon or after the eucharistic prayer, due partly to their shift in the understanding of the relationship between the word and the sacrament and partly to the then recent history of neglect and abuse of the people's communion – services in which only the minister and assistants at the table consume the elements, or the people consume but only in one of the two kinds of element. Examples of the early Protestant emphasis on instruction and exhortation before communion can be seen in Thompson 1971, specifically, 171, 177, Bucer's Strassburg liturgy, and, 202, 204, Calvin's provision for a transition to the Eucharist to be appended to the sermon or, preferably, the whole sermon devoted to the meaning and right administration of the Lord's Supper on those occasions when the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated. And Thompson indicates, 188, that beyond having a communion exhortation and instruction in the worship service, people intending to communicate on communion Sunday were to be individually examined by the minister as to their faith and manner of life. If the minister was not satisfied, a person could be barred from the table and the fellowship until their faith and life were mended. Thus, there are the individual confessional, the fencing of the table and excommunication in the Reformation tradition, a process that was mainly impractical from the get-go and is thoroughly so in modern, mobile societies that highly value individual liberty. And now it seems that in 400 years of Protestant history concern for the spiritual integrity of the faith community and protection of the Lord's table from abuse, and fear of self-incrimination due to "unworthy" or "ignorant" eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 11:27-32) have led to such strange liturgical practices as substituting a brief "communion meditation" for the sermon on communion Sundays in the case of infrequent, e.g., quarterly, communion and having an elder, deacon, or pastor give a very brief "communion

meditation” as a kind of teaching moment or mood bridge in addition to the sermon in the case of weekly communion. Having a brief communion meditation as a kind of mood bridge or required instruction separate from the sermon has even led in some Protestant communities to the strange practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper prior to the scripture reading and sermon in the order of the Sunday service. Such an order of worship certainly conforms to the familiar pattern of after the meal programs at political prayer breakfasts and mealtime service clubs and business or professional associations, dinner theatres, and the format of after dinner speakers at all manner of corporate conclaves and fund-raising banquets for charitable and political organizations. But it surely runs contrary to the Roman Catholic liturgical perspective of the sermon’s function of setting the scene and the table for the Thankful Meal. That strange order of communion before the reading and the preaching also runs counter to the Protestant liturgical perspective of the Lord’s Supper functioning as the seal of God’s promises announced in the preached Word (Calvin 1953, Vol. II, Bk. Fourth, Chap. XIV, Section 1, 491-492). These “communion meditations” in modern Protestant churches, whether given in lieu of the sermon or in addition to the sermon, usually focus on positive teaching of the meaning and gracious benefits of the Lord’s Supper rather than on the dangers of abuse or warnings to unrepentant sinners and non-believers, which is consistent with the second half of the exhortation and instruction prescribed in Calvin’s *The Form of Church Prayers* at both Strassburg and Geneva, which can be seen in Thompson 1971, 206-207. Buttrick 1987, 97, 100, disqualifies the tradition of viewing the sermon as a preface to the Eucharist that must include a “mood bridge” to what was traditionally the real heart of the Roman Catholic worship service, i.e., the Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council of 1962-64 opened the way for a major move away from such a stunted view of the function and place of the sermon in the worship service. As Massey 1980, 26, indicates: “the sermon in that (the Roman Catholic)

church's life is being regarded now as something more than an interlude in the liturgy...it is now being highlighted more and more as a serious statement about the Word and how that Word relates to the hearer's life as a means of grace." And Buttrick 1987, 230-232, affirms the inseparable relationship between preaching and Eucharist: they are bound together and should not be separated.

[¶53.1] It seems to me that in view of the many historical twists and turns about examining, instructing and exhorting worshipers in the whys and wherefores of Christian living and the fellowship of the Thankful Meal, we Christians should learn to interpret our worship practices to each other and to any visitors or inquirers by saying something like this at the introduction or invitation to the Thankful Meal, "This is what we do and this is how we do it. Our worship service (today) is structured around the Word of God spoken in scripture and preaching and the Word of God made visible, tactile, and tasty in the Thankful Meal. It is here, in the fellowship of this service of pulpit and table, that by the grace of God Jesus Christ greets us and becomes real to us again, and we are restored and refreshed in faith and fellowship with God and each other as the body of Christ, the church. And, to everyone here, including you who are visitors or inquirers or newcomers, we believe that God is glad for you to join us in every part of this celebration of God's love for the whole world and all people shown in Jesus as the Christ, the Spirit-anointed supreme leader and master healer of our lives" Or a briefer extemporaneous statement of some such sentiments could be expressed. Or there are ritual words from scripture in the service books of the churches that could be said or paraphrased to state and evoke the foundation, dignity and significance of the Thankful Meal. Any further explanation or exhortation should be left to side bar discussions at fellowship hour or hallway or parking lot encounters as well as instruction classes and interested study groups.

[¶54] **Reclaiming the biblical images of the Thankful Meal as a proclamation of the good news of God’s compassion for a hurting world (1 Cor. 11:26) and as an anticipation of the promised reunion feast when the human family comes together at the Table of God the King (Luke 13:29) opens out to the possibility of new images and alternative graphics to describe the shape of Christian worship.**

Another perspective on the inseparability of preaching and sacrament is von Allmen's 1962, 43-44, notion that preaching addresses the word to the present age whereas the sacrament anticipates the promise of the word in the age to come. Willimon 1981, 96-99, represents the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as an eschatological ecstatic experience such that one might make a case for having all, or at least part, of the sermon after the Eucharist in order to say “not yet” and to bring people back down to earth and historical time for the continued walk with Christ in discipline, witness, and service. Yet he, 98, asserts that the sermon should function as “an invitation to the gospel feast,” and expresses amazement that a large portion of Protestantism, including his own Methodist tradition, could have “forgotten” that function of the sermon for centuries by reserving the Lord’s Supper for “special” monthly, quarterly, or high holy day observances. But having the sermon function as “an invitation to the gospel feast,” i.e., the Eucharist, does not require that the sermon contain specific reference to the Lord’s Supper or to the integral relationship between Word and Table. If the gospel is proclaimed in the sermon, it is an invitation to the gospel feast. And the minister presiding at the Table could occasionally provide a reminder of the inseparable connection between proclamation and feasting, as part of the introduction to the Eucharist and the invitation to commune. In fact, the scripture and sermon are not only an invitation, they are part of the gospel feast, just as the Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 51 (Hoffman 1991, 20) orders that the people be provided with a richer fare of the feast at the table of God’s Word by way of a wider range of lections (paraphrase borrowed from Sloyan, I think).

Willimon, 98-99, depicts the structure of the Lord's Day Service with one center in the Scripture and preaching rather than the dual foci or elliptical structure and sees the relationship of Word and sacrament and other parts of the service in concentric circles. I find both images to be helpful since Christian worship cannot be fully seen from one angle of vision. So, the ellipse and the concentric circles are alternative graphics that are complementary.

[¶55] **Leading Christian teachers from the time of Augustine (4th century), and perhaps earlier, have affirmed that the word of God in scripture and preaching is sacramental and that the sacraments proclaim the word of God.**

The churches have long acknowledged that the gospel is proclaimed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. That the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist, are the Word of God set forth visibly has been taught by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, so wrote Stott 1982, 114.

Conversely, it is also recognized that the reading of God's Word and the preaching of the gospel is a sacramental event in that Christ is present in it by the power and gift of the Spirit in the assembly. Fant 1975, 116, reports that, according to Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer followed firmly Luther's tradition in asserting that there was sacrament of the Word ("*sacramentus verbi*"). This teaching appears, for example, in Bonhoeffer's 1975, 130, second lecture on preaching. Borg 2001, 28-35, 2003, 57-59, interprets the authority of the Bible in sacramental rather than monarchical terms. He notes that just as the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are made by human hands so the Bible, a book penned and assembled by human writers, is a human product and affirms that just as Christ becomes present for us in, with, and under the bread and wine (Luther's "consubstantiation" formulation), so the Spirit of God addresses us in, with, and under the human words of the Bible. And I trust that Borg would affirm the same sacramental character and function of the preached word. And just as Borg affirms that the

sacramental status and function of the Bible is only effectual as people participate in the reading and hearing of the scriptural word in a conversational and dialogic rather than merely subservient manner, the same is surely true with regard to the preached word. And Fant 1975, 118-119, cites passages in Bonhoeffer's *Christology* indicating that "proclamation, as a sacrament, does not stand as a symbol for something else; it does not *mean* something, it *is* something," that is, Christ is present in the church as the spoken word. I take this to mean that preaching is not just sacrament-like or sacramental, it is a sacrament, that is, Christ is present in the proclamation just as Christ is present in the Thankful Meal. Long 2005, 16, cites Mary Catherine Hilker's paraphrase of Augustine's insight: sacraments are visible words; words are audible sacraments. Von Allmen 1962, 7-8, asserts that God speaks through our preaching which recalls what God said in Jesus and anticipates what God will say in the final appearing of the Christ; preaching is not simply directed toward the sacraments, it is itself sacramental. Farmer 1942, 28, 97, observes that preaching is sometimes called, in a broad sense, a sacrament because "it is God's activity...it is God encountering human souls in what may at that moment prove to be the supreme crisis of their life." And that might refer not only to a life decision point or a struggle imposed by various events and circumstances, but also to the crisis of decision and struggle imposed by the crisis of encounter with the living gospel of Christ and his cross, which occasionally can occur in the sacramental event of preaching!

[¶56] **Homiletic writers of various times and stripes affirm the sacramentality of preaching and of life itself in that wherever and whenever Christ meets us, there and then our experience is sacramental.**

The preacher should cultivate a sacramental consciousness (Theodore Wardlaw 2009 a) along with her kerygmatic or indicative mode of speaking in sermons (Davis 1958, 217-219) which

will influence her sermon preparation and delivery whether the sacrament is celebrated at that service or not. Ritschl 1963 has an extensive development of the teaching that proclamation is not just an interpretation of and a meditation on the word but is in fact itself the word of God through the presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit, and that preaching is in fact the first form of the word of God as words. Thus, the preaching event is a sacrament of the presence of Christ in Christian worship whether the Eucharist is celebrated or not. As Ritschl writes, 101, “Since the hour of corporate worship is the time of the real presence of the exalted Lord in the assembly of the believers through the Holy Spirit, we must say that the self-revelation of Jesus Christ and the humiliation of the people under his Word are what constitute the service.” Therefore, “sacramental preaching” (Farmer 1942, 28,97; Coffin 1952; Doan 1980; Stott 1982, 325, [citing Forsythe, Miller, Ward, Watson]; Craddock 1983, 45-47; Willimon 2005, 60; Theodore Wardlaw 2009a) can be done even when the material sacraments are not a part of the liturgy of the day. Christ is present in the preached word as well as in the sacraments, according to Bonhoeffer’s teaching as discussed in Old 2007, 823-826, under the heading “The Kerygmatic Presence of Christ.” Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 4, note that for the Reformers, Zwingli and Calvin, “the sermon had a sacramental character, for to preach was to offer forgiveness and new life in Christ, to present the risen and living Christ himself.” Theodore Wardlaw 2009a, 9, mentions having heard a suggestion that John Calvin, when he prayed the Prayer for Illumination in his Genevan pulpit just before the scripture reading and sermon, was intentionally shifting the *epiclesis* (a traditional Catholic form which asks God to send his Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine to the flesh and blood of Christ, and a modern Protestant version which asks God to send his Holy Spirit upon *us* to change *us* so that the bread and wine may be *for us* the body and blood of Christ) portion of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving to this location, possibly to suggest that there

is something fundamentally sacramental about preaching. And Wardlaw observes that such a view of preaching might lead us to “preach not just from the sheer exegetical specificity” of the scripture text “but also with the imagination that—whatever the text—it has the potential to point us toward the sacramentality at the root of all of life.” Lord 2009, 9-10, discusses a nuanced approach of making associative connections between the sacrament and whatever text is assigned for the day’s reading and preaching, that is, using the sacraments as interpretive lenses for seeing a text and thus learning to inhabit the sacraments in our ways of worship and preaching. And she observes, 15, that preaching in a sacramental context reminds us that as there is an important liturgical event to follow the preaching, so preaching is meant to form us for continued sacramental living in the world.

[¶57] **Church preaching only takes place in the context of worship; otherwise, it is not church preaching. Thus, all church preaching is “liturgical preaching.” But the word liturgical continues to be much abused.**

While the three-year lectionaries were designed with a eucharistic context in mind, the fact of Sunday morning services without Eucharist is addressed with an increase of the number and length of readings in *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, as indicated in its Introduction, under the heading of “Using the lectionary in worship.” Sloyan 1984, 16, acknowledges that Christian services of prayer, scripture, preaching, and praise are liturgical services of thanksgiving whether the Lord’s Supper is celebrated weekly or not and whether or not that sacrament is referred to by the Greek derived word Eucharist or not — rather generous and broad minded from a Roman Catholic scripture scholar, preacher, homiletician, and liturgiologist! My definition of *liturgical* preaching at the chief Lord’s Day gathering of a Christian community is broad enough to include the many Protestant Sunday services that, unfortunately, do not include

the Lord's Supper: preaching that is suited to the setting of a worshipping community of believers whether the service includes a celebration of the Eucharist or not. Ritschl 1963, 116, asserts that the same Lord is present with or without the Lord's Supper. After all, the word liturgy does not mean Eucharist; it means worship service, literally public work or work of the people! Willimon 1981, 89, is true to the root meaning and the early church's usage when he states that liturgy is "all those things Christians do, inside church and outside, for the God they love." And he goes on at some length, 90-96, to establish the assertion of John Knox (the 20th Century theologian, not the 16th Century Reformer) that preaching is always and necessarily an act of worship or else it is not preaching. The first condition that is necessary for a sermon to have life is that it be preached as an act of worship, according to Massey 1974, 80-81. Lischer 2001, 76-92, defines the preaching of the church as all of the ways that the church talks to itself in its life of gathering for songs, readings, prayers, sermons, sacraments, and study groups and as it scatters for its life in families, jobs, recreations, witness, public works (*leitourgia*), as the church continuously forms and reforms itself as a faith community, a society that is different from the way of the world, i.e., a community of contrast. Consequently, the minister's sermon which aims to support and contribute to and is an integral part of the church's liturgical life of preaching and forming and reforming itself as a community of faith, is a liturgical sermon. Thus, liturgical does not mean ritualistic or even ordered worship, it simply means service related, and sometimes worship service related. Phifer 1965, 20, discusses a contemporary shift in the use of the word liturgy from "form used in celebration of the mass" (or Eucharist) to "pertaining to public prayer and worship." But the prevailing usage of times past persists. Shepherd 1976a, 78-79, for example, uses the two glaring redundancies: "liturgical worship" and "liturgical churches." I suppose non-liturgical churches would be those that do not have worship services and non-liturgical worship

would be worship that is not worshipful! Skudlarek 1981, 11, discusses the meaning of "liturgical churches." Some have still not got the message, including the lexicographers of *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* 11th ed., 2003! And Long 2005, 72, should have known better than to use the phrase "the more liturgical traditions." Much preferable is Mitchell's 1990, 24, construction "the more formal churches" where he means more strict in the observance of their own traditions and forms in governance and worship. And one can only use the larger context of Thompson's 1971, 319-320, footnote to divine that what he meant by the term liturgical worship was worship that follows a set order and texts that are prescribed by a commission and printed in a book. But that meaning is clearly an abuse of the word liturgical.

[¶58] **The irony of the popular, and also academic, abuse of the word liturgical is matched, or perhaps even exceeded, by the irony of the confused use of the word mass.**

Phifer 1965, 32, notes the irony of referring to the eucharistic service as the mass since the words of dismissal, *Ite, missa est*, from which the mass gets its name, were pronounced not only at the end of the eucharistic service but also at the end of the service of the word, that is, the mass of the catechumens, to dismiss the unbaptized before the eucharistic part of the service in the early Middle Ages until the practice (or notation in the Roman missal) of dismissing the catechumens prior to the Eucharist was discontinued. A further ambiguity may be seen when *Ite, missa est* is translated as a missionary charge, which is discussed by Long 2004, 65. But on what mission or errand is the catechumen, the inquirer, or the general member of the public sent? I suppose it could be the mission or errand of living life according to the teaching in the catechetical part of the service. Fant 1975, 92-102, discusses Bonhoeffer's suggestion in *Letters and Papers from Prison* of the possible need to restore the arcane or secret discipline in his vision of a church that

lives in and for the world, not so much to protect the sacrament as to protect the word of the resurrection and a world come of age from each other, and how this idea of Bonhoeffer's has been variously interpreted, welcomed or rejected. Bonhoeffer 1975, 124-125, in the first lecture of his 1930's series on preaching indicates that the "secret discipline" began under Origen after Christian preaching had developed from a speech before a closed circle of Christians into a public address open to catechumens and heathens, so that the sacraments and the recitation of the creed and the praying of the Lord's Prayer might not be exposed to public mockery. A further irony is seen in Luther's continued reference to the eucharistic service as the Mass since in his *Formula Missae* he would have the priest replace the *Ite missa* with *Benedicamus domino*, which may be seen in Thompson 1971, 113. And Thompson 1971, 37-40, discusses the supposed majesty of the Mass when its outline had reached a certain fixed form as described in the early forms of the Roman *Ordo*, including a civic papal Mass, which Thompson introduces with these words: "And here is revealed the transcendence of the Roman 'soberness and sense' in a pattern of magnificent detail and solemn splendor." Thus, liturgical preaching is worshipful preaching, not eucharistic preaching, an observation that Sloyan honors in both the title and the substance of his 1984 book, *Worshipful Preaching*.

[¶59] **Those academic-homiletic-theologians and preaching-pastor-theologians who approach the Bible as a book of theological themes to be abstracted and reassembled in the development of a series of sermons may tend to distort, misconstrue, or attenuate the nature and function of the church as a covenant community, the character and function of the Bible in the life of the church, and the purpose and function of preaching and sacraments in Christian worship.**

Blackwood 1942, 17-18, asserts that the homemade plans for preaching by quarters of the year should be thought of as directed toward and preparing for the next quarterly communion service. But

this does not lead him to suggest that the next quarterly communion service should be mentioned or even alluded to in each sermon. Nor does it lead him to limit the possible scope of sermons in development by excluding catechesis, evangelism, social issues, or any type of sermon. In fact, he sees educational ministry (catechesis) as a main value of preaching series that are planned around the study and exposition of books of the Bible. Apropos of this educational emphasis, his sermon planning year begins in September with the academic year rather than with Advent. Similarly, McArthur's 1958, 65-88, "Peterhead Lectionary," which he designed with a view to addressing the full sweep of major Christian doctrine through the year, begins October 1 with the theme of Creation and Providence in Genesis 1-11, supported by other readings selected from Old and New Testaments. The Bible book series plans that Blackwood suggests are not properly *lectio continua de scriptura* expository but rather he extracts major themes from a book of the Bible that shape up more as a thematic series. The extracted themes influence the choice of passages from the book. That approach to preaching a series of sermons on a book in the Bible, extracting major themes and selecting keynote sermon texts by themes, has been used more frequently by prominent modern preachers than the passage-by-passage approach of expounding on a Bible book in its entirety. Illustrative of that common practice is the report of the Bible book series of Charles R. Brown (1862-1950) in Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 182. If one compares the number of verses in Brown's selected sections of scripture with the number of Sundays devoted to the exposition of each, it cannot be simply a comprehensive *lectio continua de scriptura* approach. It is *lectio continua de scriptura selecta thematica topicana subjectiva*! Ronald Allen 1998, 111-112, discusses some of the values and limitations of preaching from a theme from the Bible, including a series of sermons on a theme that appears in a study of a particular section or book of the Bible, as well as a series on a theological teaching or on a current issue in church life or in public life while drawing on texts from

various parts of the Bible. Deiss 1992, 32-33, points out that dwelling too much on the component parts of Christian worship—songs, prayers, word, sacrament—can obscure its overall or global nature and purpose which is covenant renewal. Or, as Saldine 2011, 10, has it, the covenant people are assembled to be rooted in the word as it is in the world in one's particular place, to be sent in mission, to be assembled again, and so on. Worship that includes both word and sacrament may not be sufficient to ensure that the church is the locus of a covenant community in which God is experienced and not just a convened multitude of those who have experienced God. Haroutunian 1991, 66-68, indicates that the church must be a communion (community, fellowship, *koinonia*) with its institutions and not merely an institution with its adherents. And: "Hence, communion, no less than preaching and the administration of the sacraments, is a means of that grace by which is the knowledge of God."

[¶60] **A narrow definition of "liturgical preaching" as focused on setting the scene for the feast of the Lord's Supper and therefore avoiding much in the way of teaching sermons and evangelistic sermons runs contrary to the diversity of sermon types, emphases, and aspects that have been identified in the New Testament and in the early church and in Christian history generally.**

When it comes to evangelism in Sunday sermons, Fuller 1957 & 1987 acknowledges only that liturgical preaching, i.e., preaching in the chief Sunday service, may help the already converted with their always needed re-evangelization. Skudlarek 1981, 16-17, cautions that preaching *lectio continua* through a book of the Bible or any plan to organize a preaching schedule around needed theological or ethical teachings is likely to turn the sermon into a classroom lecture rather than a constitutive part of a worship service that celebrates the presence and mystery of Christ in the lives of the people. And in 1991, 363, Number 72, he allows that the liturgical homily, the style of which he sees as conversational but not too chatty rather than oratorical in tone, may incorporate

some theological instruction and moral exhortation, but insists that much of catechesis and any focused evangelization must take place in other settings. Ronald Allen 1998, 33, discusses the usefulness and possible abuses of an evangelistic strategy that uses special “seeker services” “designed to introduce the gospel to persons who have never made an affirmation of faith or have drifted away from the Christian faith or community.” Dodd 1962, 7-8, discusses three kinds of preaching found in the early Christian church: (1) proclamation (*keryssein*) of the gospel (*kerygma*) or Christian message to the non-Christian world; (2) teaching (*didaskein*) was in large measure ethical instruction in Christian living; (3) exhortation (*parakesis* or *homilia*) was the more or less informal discussion of various aspects of Christian life and thought, addressed to a congregation already established in the faith. However, he also notes, 53, that the continued delay or indefinite postponement of the promised apocalypse and second appearing (*parousia*) of the Lord had inevitably led to an increase of *didache* and a decrease of *kerygma* in the preaching of the apostles reflected in both the Epistles and the Gospels and throughout the history of Christian preaching. Bonhoeffer devoted the first of his Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics, seen in Fant 1975, 123-126, to “Historical Considerations,” in which he discusses the several expressions for preaching in the New Testament including the cultural background and usage of each term in Greek society along with examples of the usage and context of each word in scriptural texts. Then in the tenth lecture he provides, 161-165, a brief overview of Augustine’s discussion of homiletics in *De Doctrina Christiana* based on the classical rhetoric of Cicero and discusses some of the features of and cautions regarding the doctrinal sermon, the inspirational sermon, and the evangelistic sermon. Deiss 1976, 295, allows that the homily may take the form of catechetical instruction, as Origen’s homilies do. Dargan 1904, 25, notes that two paramount elements of Christian preaching appear in the work of the Apostles: evangelism and instruction. Broadus and

Weatherspoon 1944, 60, discuss the importance, function, and manner of doctrinal or teaching sermons in the history of Protestant preaching. Von Allmen 1962, 10-11, insists that liturgical or worshipful preaching includes both evangelistic, that by which God gathers his people unto the sacrament of *baptism*, and catechetical, that by which God builds up his people in the sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*. However, he notes that one should not preach to the baptized as if they were still slaves in Egypt but recognize that we are all in the “wilderness” together and in need of “water,” “manna,” and protection against “Amalek,” i.e., drift into heathenism. Deiss 1976, 296, discusses three kinds of preaching found in the New Testament: *kerygma* (proclamation, announcement), *didaskalia* (instruction, catechesis, teaching), and *paranesis* (advice, recommendation, exhortation, that is, ethical admonition).

[¶61] **The distinctions among the various types of sermons and the various intentions or goals of preaching in Christian history and current practice are sometimes overemphasized since the types overlap in practice and most preaching situations require a blend of several functions of the sermon.**

Old 1998a (Vol. 1), 8-18, describes five genres of preaching that have appeared and reappeared throughout the whole history of preaching and that constitute the scope of his seven-volume study: expository, evangelistic, catechetical, festal, and prophetic. He also notes 2007 (Vol. 7), 527, the similarity between his list and that of Coffin 1926: expository, doctrinal, ethical, pastoral, and evangelistic. Bonhoeffer 1975, 125, has a brief summation of the historical origins and development and the perennial challenge of preaching for the maintenance and building up of the life of the congregation while also preaching to make new Christians. Barth 1991, 57-62 and 111, having specified the sacraments in the church as the necessary setting for preaching, asserts that there is no difference between church or liturgical preaching and preaching to the world: “...the

witness in scripture...is given...to people who are called by the Word of God and will be called over and over again. In other words, the witness of holy scripture (and thus of the church's preaching) speaks to the world which is to become the church." Keller 2015, 18-20, describes how he has managed to address the gospel at the same time to both those who believe and those who do not. Brilioth 1965b, 8-15, presents the primary (liturgical, exegetical, prophetic) and secondary (catechetical, paranetic [ethical admonition], scholastic) elements or types of preaching in biblical and historical perspective, along with comments as to what extent the secondary elements might appropriately be incorporated in sermons at regular Sunday service. Notice that Brilioth does not mention evangelism as a category or function of church preaching which points toward Buttrick's notion of evangelistic preaching as an "out church" function of the laity, discussed below [¶ 62]. Brooks 1989, 101-103, responds to a popular outcry against doctrinal or catechetical preaching by asserting that the problem is not that ministers preach doctrine but that they do not preach Christian teachings with the target of moving people to transformed character through adherence and loyalty to Christ. He also asserts, 104, that sermons should not be strictly categorized as one type or one purpose or another since every effective sermon will be a blend of several types and styles with one or another predominating in each sermon, depending on the subject, the text, and the situation. Farmer 1942, 66-67, agrees that a catechetical sermon should not exclude proclamation and a claim on the hearer's will. And, in fact, the claim on the will is often the most effective when presented indicatively rather than hortatively. Fant and Pinson 1995, III, 264, cite Thomas Chalmers' (1780-1847) objection to a then prevalent among Scottish preachers opposition between evangelistic preaching and preaching on ethical or moral issues: "It has the effect of instituting an opposition where no opposition should be supposed to exist." Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 2, observe that modern writers may have overdone the

divisions suggested by the variety of New Testament words referring to the oral public ministry of Jesus since “Preaching in the meaning and purpose of Jesus included all elements calculated to stir the mind in all its functions and lead men to see, to feel, to evaluate, and to make moral decisions,” and they, 155, classify the functions of preaching “as evangelistic, theological, ethical, devotional, inspiring, and actional.” Fant 1975, 118, 122, cites Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being* 1961, 144, “dogma is not the aim but the condition of preaching” and in the lectures on preaching, “There is teaching in the gospel, but the gospel is not teaching.” Massey 1974, 94-95, indicates that the Sermon on the Mount exhibits the ability of Jesus to blend preaching and teaching. And Massey 1980, 61-62, in his chapter “Designing the Doctrinal/Topical Sermon” indicates that the distinction between preaching and teaching in the Bible has sometimes been overdone in the history of church scholarship since the apostles followed the lead of Jesus: “they proclaimed as they taught, and they made their teachings preach.” Massey also suggests that the term doctrinal should be taken more as indicating the function of instructing people in the truth about life in relation to God rather than a message that talks about a particular doctrine or addresses official church dogma.

[¶62] **The Christian mission of evangelization of people in the world outside of the church requires, *in addition to the consistently attractive example of integrity in just, compassionate, and truthful living and public engagement by Christians individually and communally, a joint effort of personal witness and welcoming invitation by the laity in their encounters and relationships outside of the church along with fostering an open and welcoming climate in the church assembly and the effort of ministers and the whole congregation in pastoral preaching within the church.***

Willimon 1981, 91, observes that keeping the focus and purpose of worship on proclamation, praise, and adoration of God rules out making other functions such as to educate, soothe, or judge,

a primary focus in worship; yet any of these and other functions may take place in worship depending on how we do the proclamation and praise. Craddock 2002, 15-30, discusses the matter of what types of preaching are appropriate within the community of faith, i.e., preaching to the “already converted.” It need not exclude evangelism and catechesis but should not be overly didactic or information laden. In 2011, 35, he observes that sermons can and should communicate substantive information, “there is something redemptive about information,” “but preaching is not primarily about transferring information.” As Haddon Robinson 2001, 104, 170-172, advised: “Remember that you are not lecturing to people about the Bible. You are talking to people about themselves from the Bible.” And Craddock 2002, 76-77, follows Kierkegaard in recognizing that indirect communication (contemporary stories, parables, images) is not the primary method needed in evangelism and missionary work. Haddon Robinson 2001, 109-110, recommends that preachers exercise the discipline of stating the purpose of the sermon they are developing in measurable terms and gives examples, some of which point to changes in behavior and some of which indicate a new mastery of certain biblical knowledge or theological concepts. Lowry 1997, 66-71, indicates that narrative approaches to structuring sermons can help preachers avoid the “explanatory blight” that often comes along with heavily exegetical preaching (also cited above [¶ 47]). With regard to catechesis, and especially exegesis, Buttrick 1987, 41, points the way to avoiding didacticism in the development of sermon moves: “Preachers do not explicate teachings; they explore symbols” (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 56]). Of course, Brilioth 1965b, 8-15 (cited above [¶ 61]), does not mention evangelistic preaching at all in his discussion of the synagogue preaching of Jesus at Nazareth, either in the “primary elements” or in the “secondary elements.” Jesus did not so much proclaim the gospel as he was the gospel. Von Allmen 1965, 77-79, relegates overt world evangelization to the early part of the Sunday worship service, that is,

through scripture reading and preaching but not through the peoples' prayers and the Lord's Supper; yet he acknowledges an evangelistic impact of the whole service on the world. And Buttrick 1987, 233-4, suggests evangelistic preaching is best done by the laity as an out-church function. Here, Buttrick echoes William Temple (1881-1944) who, as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 183, believed that Christian social action was "pre-evangelism" and that direct individual evangelism is the task not of preachers nor of church organizations but of the laity. Yet "the laity" themselves are not disciples of Jesus Christ unless they are part of that fellowship which Christ calls out of the world and which is gathered by the Holy Spirit each Lord's Day to be refreshed and reconstituted through pastoral preaching and the communion of the Lord's Table. As Leslie Weatherhead (1893-1976) emphasized, according to Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 114, preaching aims at securing those conditions in which conversion, the gift of God and a work of the Holy Spirit, can happen, and the context for conversion must be the community of God gathered together in worship. Thus, we may say that the process of Christian evangelization must be a cycle which involves both the out-church witness, testimony, mission, service, and invitation of the laity and the in-church witness, testimony, mission, service, and invitation of pastoral preaching and communal worship, that is, the action and responsibility of pastor and people together.

[¶63] **The necessity and effectiveness of personal sharing of the meaning of Christian faith and practice in our own lives are documented in Christian history; and the means of strengthening this aspect of Christian evangelization of the world in the present moment are readily accessible.**

Is the out-church part of evangelization realistic? Can Christian people be expected to do evangelistic proclamation as an out-church function? First, such testimony by Christians both

within the community and in the larger world of our everyday encounters and callings has always been happening and continues to happen with greater and lesser degrees of intentionality. Second, such Christian talk of God in church and out of church can, with some study, training, and encouragement, be done with greater intentionality, freedom, frequency, and effectiveness, for which Long's 2004 *Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* could be one of the useful resources available. Long, 27, states that "As early as the New Testament era, Christians (people of 'the Way') knew that speaking their faith to each other, to their families and out in the world was difficult, but they also knew that the Christian faith takes shape, grows and spreads through the spoken word. Learning how to speak the faith then was crucial." Long explores the potential and the problems of testimony to Christian faith in contemporary society. Especially noteworthy are the comments of Dorothy C. Bass in the Editor's Foreword and a citation of Walter Brueggemann 1993 in Chapter Seven. Learning to speak the faith in love and with intellectual integrity within the community of the Way is just as serious and difficult as doing so out in the unbelieving world. As Bonhoeffer 1954, 105, observed, "Where Christians live together the time must inevitably come when in some crisis one person will have to declare God's Word and will to another." But, of course, speaking the faith to the world and to one another is not just a resort for crisis moments. It is part of the call of all people in the Christian Way for all times and in all places and circumstances. It can only be done in a constant mindset of prayerfulness. As Long 2004, 19, wrote, "What we want to do is nothing less than the psalmist's plea, 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer' (Psalm 19:14)." Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 214, tell how William Booth (1829-1912), founder of The Salvation Army, discovered that the poor people of his congregation were much more receptive and responsive to the gospel witness of a poor old "gypsy" hawker that he had called out of the

pews than to the staid church preaching manner which he had adopted during his time as a Methodist church minister, which was not Booth's natural style and demeanor. And, of course, it is legendary that Booth and his band of volunteers left the church buildings to take the love of God and God's good news into the streets. Long 2005, 51, asserts that preaching in the church and preaching outside the church are essentially the same—bearing witness to Christ—but in different settings. Both perspectives, Buttrick's and Long's, emphasize the communal aspect of preaching: it happens within the gathered community of faith and it happens through the scattered community of faith. Diogenes Allen 1989, 15, notes that Austin Farrer rejects the notion that an intellectual seeker of meaning in life moves from evidence for a non-religious theism to embracing an actual religion by a leap of faith, understood as a substitute for evidence: "On the contrary, it is with an 'initial faith' or with a full faith (each of which usually develops through interaction with a believing community) that we look critically at nature, history, human nature and Scripture. There is thus no 'gap' to be closed by 'faith' after we have engaged in critical study." I have a reference in Chapter I [¶ 6] to Diogenes Allen's own take on the non-necessity for a leap of faith with regard to entertaining the likelihood or necessity of an intelligence, such as God, behind the system of order observed in earthly and cosmic nature.

[¶64] **Some congregations/parishes have been repeatedly disappointed by the failure of their community outreach programs to attract new members or even visitors or inquirers: carnivals on the church grounds, information or activity booths at community or neighborhood festivals, sharing of their physical facilities with community service groups, sending volunteers to help with humanitarian service organizations, investment in advertising via signage and banners on church grounds, highway billboards, public media announcements. What's wrong with this picture?**

Everything seems to be in place and functioning well except the individual one-on-one personal

style of invitation, inclusion, friendship, and, most especially, a ready, opportunistic, first person indicative (i.e., not didactic, hortatory, or argumentative) testimony as to why and how participation in Christian faith and church community is so highly meaningful in the speaker's own life. This requires practice in speaking with "I-me-my messages" rather than "you-it-your messages." I-me-my messages as in "I feel a sense of belonging in a loving fellowship where we depend on a higher power than ourselves." or "My sense of dependence on God is restored when the good news of God's love and forgiveness is preached in worship." You-it-your messages, as in "it does X for you" or "you must do Y first," do not belong in personal witness and testimony about one's own experience of Christian faith and practice. Could this be something of what Buttrick means by evangelistic "preaching" as an out-church function of the laity? Thus, it seems to me, that if initial faith and full faith are to develop through interaction with a believing community (Diogenes Allen), then the out-church "preaching" or outreaching witness and testimony of church people must have a strong component of social welcoming, invitation, inclusion, friendship, and a ready opportunistic, indicative testimony as to why and how participation in Christian faith and fellowship, mutual burden bearing, and worldly service is so highly meaningful in one's own life quality and sense of well-being, a witness evidenced not just in words but also in the personal style, bearing, and social grace of individual believers, an element that is often missing when churches organize to reach out to the larger community and make the church more visible through community festivals, humanitarian service, and other human service or celebrative institutes or events whether under church auspices or not and whether on church property or not.

[¶65] **Embracing and exploring what it means to recognize that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not simply a matter of subscribing to a belief**

system but is a life Way of walking on a spiritual path in partnership with other walkers along the same Way can go far toward restoring a sense of hope in and for the church and its ever-stumbling efforts to be an attractive and welcoming community of faith that provides a nurturing and challenging structure of positive living for families and individuals.

Barbara Brown Taylor 1993, 150, makes a good case for the much disparaged “friendship evangelism,” “welcoming church,” “family programs” approach that requires kerygmatic church preaching in Sunday services if evangelization is to be effective. There must be water there when you bring ‘em to the trough. Part of Taylor’s point is that Christians do not simply belong to the community of faith because we believe, but rather our belief stems from and is nurtured by the fact that we belong to the church community. Bonhoeffer 1958, 50, notes that the call of Christ to the first disciples, according to the Gospel accounts, came first as a call to obedience and belonging—“follow me”—and then later to belief, recognizing and declaring him as the Christ—“who do you say that I am?”—rather than vice versa. That perspective of obedience or some kind of action or mental adjustment as a kind of ‘preparation’ for faith may be reprised in Bonhoeffer 1972, 311, in the 29 May 1944 letter to Bethge where he wrote of helping people to get out of their one track minds in order to attenuate the panic response under the stress triggered by air raid alarms. Consider also the “evangelistic” work of Philip in bringing his brother Nathaniel to meet Jesus (John 1:43-51) and the “evangelistic” work of the woman of Samaria who summoned the whole village of Sychar to come and see Jesus (John 4:1-30). And Bonhoeffer 1958, 182-183, makes clear that discipleship for us today involves both belonging and believing. Belonging includes cleaving physically to the fellowship of Christ’s body the church, especially through the sacraments of Christ’s biological body—Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Believing includes tending to our faith relationship with Christ—learning from the example and teachings of Jesus

through prayer, biblical study, discussion, sharing, teaching, and preaching. In any case, such essential public witness by the faithful among our neighbors in the world does not in any measure gainsay the fact that every sermon preached by congregation and minister at the chief Sunday service should, with the help of the Holy Spirit, be a faith inspiring, faith initiating, faith renewing, evangelizing proclamation of good news. If such is lacking, it is not church preaching and not complete Christian worship. Further, if worship, preaching, fellowship, study, and service in a person's congregation isn't experienced as vital, true, honest, edifying, comforting, challenging, welcoming, and loving, then it may be difficult for one to feel sufficient motivation, freedom, strength, courage, honesty, and integrity in inviting a neighbor to visit and to tell that neighbor how and why the faith and the fellowship are so important and meaningful in one's own life. Borg 2003, 193-194, goes so far as to suggest that if one's church congregation is not adequately feeding one's faith life of worship, fellowship, growth, and service, and shows no prospect of doing so, then one should seek a congregation that does nourish one's practice of the Christian Way. And while Borg, 222, affirms that "one can be in relationship with God apart from participation in community and tradition, community and tradition matter." Thus, the church as fellowship matters and historic church teaching and practice matter. Borg has some practical observations as to why and how participation in a historic faith community can be foundational and an enlarging resource in the development and maintenance of one's personal faith way of living and one's personal religious practice, to wit:

We need a path. We are lost without one. Community and tradition articulate, embody, and nurture a path. They provide practical means of undertaking the path, not as a requirement for entering the next world, but as a path of reconnection and transformation in this life.

Religious community and tradition put us in touch with the wisdom and beauty of the past. They are communities of memory. There is value in being in touch with the past. Not only does it contain wisdom, but it can deliver us from the provinciality of the present, our limited way of seeing that we seldom recognize as a form of blindness. There

is much to be said for being part of a tradition centuries old rather than one made up yesterday.

And, though all the traditions have their monsters and have at times been distorted in brutal directions, they also have incubated lives remarkably filled with compassion, courage, and joy. The saints of the traditions are the most remarkable people who have ever lived. The vision of life articulated by the traditions is both appealing and important, not only for us as individuals but for us as sharing the earth.

[¶66] **It is part of the nature, constitution, and mood of Christian worship to proclaim through the sermon, the setting, and all of the actions and sounds of the congregation, the musical leaders, the preacher, and other servants of worship a persuasive message of glad tidings and to communicate a genuine mood of celebration and hope.**

Wilson 2007, 209-226, has a chapter on the whys and hows of composing persuasive sermons and, 210-211, he suggests, citing Robin Meyers, the notion that in order to preach the gospel persuasively the preacher must persuade oneself and then, according to Meyers, preach in such a way as to get people “to talk to themselves in specific ways about specific things,” which “happens through vicarious identification with the emotional states of others.” Lischer 2001, 11, notes that preaching - as the sum total of speakers, listeners and settings throughout the church, that is, preaching as the ceaseless activity of the church, by virtue of its names (*euangelizomai*—glad tidings, *kerusso*—publish, *martureo*—testify/witness) cannot stray as far from the gospel as can academic theology, including homiletic theology! Keller 2015, 3, quotes 1 Peter 4:10-11:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

And he suggests that the spiritual gift of speaking described here may be thought of as a word ministry of ordinary Christians including personal exhortation or counseling, evangelism, and teaching by and among individuals and groups. Thus, the faith proclaimed to a non-believing world by the apostles, the items of the apostolic *kerygma* assembled by Dodd 1962 (1937) from

the New Testament preaching of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, must also be proclaimed inside the church to the already converted who are continually in need of reconversion (Fuller 1957, Skudlarek 1981). As Karl Barth is reported somewhere to have answered a student who asked why we should attend church worship to hear the same gospel proclaimed every Sunday: “because our life is a continual falling away.” Similarly, Barth 1991, 111, as mentioned above, asserted that “the witness in scripture...is given...to people who are called by the Word of God and will be called over and over again.” Old 1998a, 180, contends that no matter where and under what circumstances missionary or evangelistic preaching takes place, it is worship because it always constitutes an invitation to repentance and baptism. “Missionary preaching is part of the sacrament of baptism,” he wrote. And Old 2010, 599, notes that for D. T. Niles (1908-1970), the world-famous Methodist evangelist in Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon), evangelistic preaching (proclamation - *keryssein*) is an essential part of Christian worship.

[¶67] **Preaching and teaching in the history and current practice of the Christian church are not exactly the same thing, but there is always an element of teaching in preaching; and proclamation is always assumed or is in the background of Christian teaching.**

Davis 1958, 104-119, reviews the reassessment of the function of church preaching during the middle of the Twentieth Century prompted in part by Karl Barth’s approach to theology as the examination of the church’s preaching in light of the Word of God (*Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Vol. I, Part I, 1955 [1936]) and prompted in part by the influence of C. H. Dodd’s 1962 [1937] study of the respective places of *kerygma* (proclamation) and *didache* (teaching) in the earliest church. Farmer 1942, 29 ff., thinks that Barth pushes the distinction between proclamation and teaching too far. Whether or not the apostolic church separated proclamation (*kerygma*) and teaching (*didache*) into occasions for the conversion of unbelievers

and occasions for the edification of believers, Davis 1958, 120-126, does not accept that such a bifurcation is an appropriate guide for how and what and when we preach and teach in the church of modern times, or for the language that we use in discussing preaching and teaching in and out of the church today. He further spells out the function of teaching as a duty of the pulpit minister and makes clear that the teaching (*didache* or *didaskalia*) is part of what we preach and the proclamation (*kerygma*) is part of what we teach. Willimon 1981, 64-71, writes of the inseparability of preaching and teaching, including a summary reference to recent critiques of Dodd's thesis of a sharp division between the two in the early Christian church. Stott 1982, 122, suggests that Dodd's elucidation of the distinction between teaching and preaching in the New Testament may have been overplayed in recent writing and practice. A strict line of demarcation between preaching and teaching does not and cannot exist in reality. Farley 1996, 166-167, makes it clear that preaching as a discourse of redemption in the liturgical context of a faith community cannot strictly separate proclamation and teaching, nor can it exclude an evangelizing impact upon worshipers and the larger community and world where the worshipers live. Diogenes Allen 1989, 99-127, *Chapter Six* "The Experience of God's Grace: Faith and the Book of Scripture," referencing Austin Farrer again, discusses the elements of personal spiritual growth and change that must take place as the philosophical seeker or the person with an initial faith engages with Scripture and a believing community and aspires to develop a mature faith: I. One must consent to being changed, 101-105; II. One must submit to judgment, i.e., self-examination as a rebellious creature under the eye of our Creator," 105-111; III. One must accept the inevitability of suffering and vulnerability, both of the Christ and of ourselves (Simone Weil is cited extensively), 111-120; IV. One must seek reconciliation with all people, 120-127. Allen's discussion makes clear that the role of the Christian community in facilitating such growth from an initial or inquiring faith

toward a more mature and integrated faith and its role as a beacon for the life of the whole world, requires that its preaching must include teaching and its teaching must include the announcement of the gospel of grace, i.e., proclamation. Allen provides further support for the important role of teaching along with proclamation in Christian communities in *Chapter Seven* “The Reasonableness of Faith.” There, 145-148, he writes about the interplay among the “order of the body,” the “order of the intellect,” and the “order of the heart.” Thus, a leap of faith is not seen as closing the eyes and jumping across the gap where empirical evidence is lacking but rather transitioning from the order of the intellect to the order of the heart. On the other hand, Ritschl 1963, 97-103, would have some limits on integrating teaching in preaching and preaching in teaching. In the interest of keeping the sermon focused on *kerygma* (proclamation) he would have a five-minute teaching segment in the worship service for the purpose of reading a scripture passage and giving brief exegetical notes. I agree with the intention of separating exegetical or catechetical details from the sermon proper to the extent that I have suggested in Book II, n. 19 [¶ 3. a.] that any introductory comment about the current series and the larger scriptural and calendar context of the day’s scripture and sermon should be made in an introduction (*incipit*) to the reading of the principal scripture lection rather than as part of the sermon. Sometimes I have listed in the order of service handout an item INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD (OR NEW) TESTAMENT READING and have subtitled it A TEACHING MOMENT.

[¶68] **The primacy of oral communication—the spoken word—in the origins of human language and in the essential nature of what it means to be human could be reflected in Christian preaching if it were not sabotaged by the public reading of sermon manuscripts in the place of preaching.**

Scholes 1974, 173, asserts that “with or without a theory of imagination, students of man

(humankind) must accept language as the primary characteristic of human existence.” But, originally, it is not language in general but spoken language that distinguishes humankind. Alter 1981, 182, observes that the studied incorporation of dialogue in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible reflects the fact that “to the ancient Hebrew writers speech seemed the essential human faculty: by exercising the capacity of speech man demonstrated, however imperfectly, that he was made in the image of God.” Bonhoeffer 1975, 128, told his preaching students, “Nothing is equal in dignity to the spoken word.” Lischer 2001, 2-13, discusses the oral roots of the New Testament writings, the oral roots of theology in liturgical proclamation and dialogue, and the possibility for preaching to call theology back to its oral quality of proclamation and dialogue—if only preaching would clean up its own oral act which has become corrupted by the public reading of sermon manuscripts. And, 48-62, he begins his chapter on “Preaching as the Word of God” with further discussion of the primacy of the spoken word and preaching as an oral-aural transaction, with citations from Gerhard Ebeling, Walter Ong, Martin Luther, Birger Gerhardsson, and others. Lischer discusses the sermon as the oral word of God and asserts that the sermon does not exist until it is uttered. Wilson 2007, 187-207, has a chapter on “Speaking for the Ear” in which he makes clear that composing for the ear involves more than speaking out loud while writing; it involves learning to think differently, more concretely and less abstractly, think more like people in preprint societies and cultures, more like people who faced oral exams in higher education (ear-mouth-ear), less like people who face only written exams (page-eye-page), more like radio/TV interviewers and those being interviewed, less like textbook or even journalistic editors. A sermon manuscript is not a sermon. A sermon only exists in the preaching moment. Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 267, report that Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1991) was so convinced of the oral nature of sermons that rather than edit his sermon notes or manuscript for publication he had his preached

sermons transcribed from stenographers' notes or tape recordings and published as spoken. That commitment to the orality of preaching and to having his sermons transcribed and published as preached rather than editing his notes for publication is surely related to Lloyd-Jones' emphasis on the importance of the anointing of the Holy Spirit for preachers, mentioned, 269, in a four-page quotation of James I. Packer (also referenced above [¶ 30]). I have remarked in an earlier paragraph [¶ 30] about the close correspondence in Forbes' 1989 study of Holy Spirit anointing in the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic recovery of that biblical terminology (divine anointing of national leaders and prophets) of the marks of anointing as Forbes' delineates them with the structures and themes of Protestant and Roman Catholic theological perspectives under the headings of spiritual and ecclesiastical calling or vocation to preaching and other forms of Christian ministry.

[¶69] **Effective oral communication in preaching can be enhanced by the practice of oral sermon preparation.**

Lischer 2001, 60, indicates that the preacher may go beyond the good advice to "write for the ear" and do sermon preparation orally since "The more oral a minister's sermon preparation, the more aural (and intelligible) will be the final product." Lischer is not necessarily recommending oral composition in the moment of preaching but rather oral composition in the minister's study or sermon workshop. I suspect that many preachers have found themselves speaking lines of their sermon out loud in the study in the midst of writing, with the assembled congregation before them in the mind's eye and then scribbling those words for a sermon manuscript. Lowry 1997, 116, acknowledges doing that regularly, that is, "writing the manuscript out loud;" and he cites Clyde Fant's *Preaching for Today* on how to prepare "the oral manuscript." Gerald Kennedy, as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 148-149, tells of outlining (he insists on preaching from a

clear outline) his sermon on Tuesday morning (after months of planning, thinking, gathering notes and materials, and two hours of theological reading daily), talking it through on Wednesday morning, Thursday morning, Friday morning, Saturday morning, and very early on Sunday morning—oral preparation, no manuscript. Lischer 2001, 60, notes that oral sermon preparation “will undoubtedly entail simpler sermon designs, the use of formula repetition, less precision in analysis, and a return to the great preaching themes and stories of the Bible.” And he observes, citing Walter J. Ong 1977, 104, 114, and Henry Mitchell 1977, 74-95, that, “It is no surprise that the above are characteristics of communication in preliterate societies, and it is no accident that they have appeared most clearly and successfully in the Black preaching tradition. Mitchell 1990, 123-127, discusses the delicate balance and interplay between careful preparation using educated scholarship and incorporating the spontaneity characteristic of Black preaching and a major contribution of Black culture in preaching that flows from a spiritual partnership of the preacher with God and the congregation. He does not rule out the writing of sermon notes or manuscripts but he insists that preaching from these should allow for spontaneous interpolations (also cited in Chapter V [¶ 23] where I have further comments and citations on speaking extemporaneously and speaking from manuscripts or notes.) Lischer 2001, 60, states that “The Black tradition knows that language is half speaking and half listening, i.e., active responsive listening, and therefore has intuitively grasped the Word of God as a ‘speech event’ long before that phrase slipped in and out of vogue.” Lischer 2001, 60, further discusses the “fluid and fleeting nature of (spoken) language” and notes that “far from being an accidental property of preaching to be lamented, belongs to its nature; the spoken word has its fullest truth among the people between whom it flourishes, and the moment at which it happens.” As he wrote and emphasized at the head of the paragraph “*The sermon is the Word of God for a particular time, place, and people.*” Bond 2003, 53-55, discusses

the convergence of formal learning and the cultural memory of slave preachers and the storytellers of tribal Africa in the love of metaphor and story language evident in the work of the Black homiletic theologian Gardner Taylor, and cites Ong 1967 on the finite and ephemeral power of the spoken word, and she, 55, quotes Taylor 1977, 44: “how strange of God to make the uttered word, so fragile and so tenuous, the principal carrier of so precious a cargo.” Lischer 2001, 71, in a chapter on “Christian Anthropology,” under the heading ‘What Makes Preaching Possible,’ writes that the origin of human speech is related to worship and speaking with God in that, “Christian anthropology has used the term ‘Image of God’ to describe the intimate, responsive relationship between God and humanity.”

[¶70] **Again: The primacy of oral communication—the spoken word—in the origins of human language and in the essential nature of what it means to be human can be reflected in Christian preaching if it is not obfuscated by a profusion of printed handouts, such as fill-in-the-blanks sermon outlines, or a superfluous use of screen-projected “visual aids” or “show-and-tell artifacts” – all good for the lecture hall or experiential learning center but not for Christian proclamation and celebration.**

The good and sufficient visual, tactile, experiential elements in Christian worship are contained in the interior architectural or outdoor natural setting with fixed or makeshift furnishings of Altar/Table, Pulpit, Baptistry/Font, hymn books, prayer books; the corporate action of praise, prayer, and sacraments; and the fact that the worshipers participate willy-nilly as individuals and as a community in making the sermon by creating their own meaning out of what the minister speaks.

Niedenthal and Rice 1980, 7, note that "Faith is 'an acoustical affair,' according to Luther; it comes from hearing the Word." This fact surely argues against the obnoxious faith-blocking liturgical insult of distributing fill-in-the-blanks sermon outlines at Sunday worship service, as if one could best be caught up in the community of God's word and be nourished in faith through hearing *while at the same time taking a completion test on paper!* The practice of providing

printed handouts for taking notes on the sermon is so inappropriate in so many different ways that one hardly knows where to begin, as my stumbling effort here attests. Lowry 1997, 47-48, 66-67, 69-71, 107, suggests that a fill-in-the-blanks approach to preaching is a particular tendency or temptation when sermons are propositional or explanatory in form. But, in my opinion, handing out fill-in-the-blanks sermon outlines is never appropriate, not even when the sermon is discursive in form and heavy with exegetical observations, theological concepts, and sociological data or even Bible trivia. Such a practice confirms and reinforces the failure of memory caused by the invention of printing as predicted by Thamus the king of Egypt, referenced by Troeger 1990, 67-68. It is an affront to and a denial of the primacy of the spoken word over the written word (Davis 1958, 164-165; Lischer 2001, 48-62, citing Ong 1967, 1977; Powell 1997, 32-59, on Derrida, Saussure, and others). It is oblivious to the philosophical concept that the distinctiveness of humans in the animal world is our use of symbols, *first* in the power of speech, according to Langer 1993, 26, 45; or, as Zuurdeeg 1958, 69-95, has it, “*homo loquens*: man establishes his existence by speaking;” and, *secondly*, Langer 1993, 72, in the capacity to make and recognize visual representations and symbols. Bultmann 1958, 55-56, writing from the perspective of existentialist philosophy, attributes to Kierkegaard the concept that human existence is unique in that only humans are conscious of having a personal history, a sense of a past, a present, and a future. Allen and Springstead 2007, 227, indicate that Derrida upends the traditional view since Plato of the primacy of speech over writing but not in a way to suggest that printed handouts could necessarily enhance an essentially speaking/hearing event but rather to show that speech is a kind of “psychic-or oral-writing” and can have some of the same problems of distance and lack of immediacy that written texts inevitably have. A memorized talk spoken in a professorial or ministerial tone comes to mind, as does a politician’s recitation of a speech writer’s teleprompter

words as if reading a shopping list. Or, as the transactional analysis school of psychology so generously pointed out in the 1960's and 1970's, those who are slightly more neurotic than I tend to play the same "tapes" (mental recordings or documents saved on their mental hard drives or in mental cloud storage) over and over again in their everyday conversations. The printed handout fad ignores the fact, pointed out by Ritschl 1963, 15, 25, that the preached word of God appeared before the written word of God. It ignores the fact that the "loquacious God," Willimon 2005, 8, revealed through the Bible only wrote on two occasions, both times on tablets of stone and one of those a do-over, according to Deut. 5:22; 10:4; Ex. 32:15-16; 34:27-28. (Ex. 34:27-28 has Moses doing the writing while God dictates). Or, God wrote on three occasions if one includes the appearance of the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace in Babylon with a message of judgment for King Belshazzar, Daniel 5:5. Otherwise, God speaks and acts; scribes, prophets, and priests write it down, often speaking what God speaks before recording it. The obnoxious practice of handing out fill-in-the-blanks sermon notes reflects an utter confusion of the genre of proclamation with the genre of lecture, which Willimon 2005, 60-61, discusses.

[¶71] **There may be occasions when printed matter and screen-projected audio-visuals in worship assemblies can be helpful with judicious use in some parts of the service; but they are best excluded during that part of the service when the congregation is participating with the preacher in creating that oral-aural transaction known as the sermon, the homily, or the preaching.**

Long 2005, 225-226, cites Walter J. Ong to the effect that asking the members of an audience to read a handout provided for them breaks up the unity of audience and speaker as each reader enters into a private reading world. Ronald Allen 1998, 44-53, in a section on "The Larger World as a Context for Preaching" makes clear that while human communication has generally

transitioned from oral-aural in the pre-modern era to print-based in the modern era and then to multi-media in the postmodern era, citing Ong 1967. And Allen notes that `while the modern age of print had both positive and negative influences on the oral-aural performance of preaching, yet the “new homiletics” of the multi-media communication age of postmodernism has not generally recommended the incorporation of advanced show-and-tell technologies such as videos, PowerPoint slides or other audiovisuals, but rather has reached back to the pre-modern oral-aural communication mode of the spoken word in stories, images, metaphors, narrative structures and inductive logic in speech. On the other hand, Wilson 2007, 151-152, thinks that the increasing use of projection screens in worship services is irreversible and can be an aid in communication in preaching when used with discretion. I myself recognize some of the provisional values of projected images in worship services that Wilson mentions, but I insist they always constitute a net loss when used in *the sermon*. Preaching is an oral-aural transaction intended to foster a communal encounter with God and not intended to transmit information, although that is usually a necessary component or byproduct. Visual images can and must be created or retrieved by way of the spoken word and the listening ear. Perhaps an artifact, projected image, or other visual aid displayed as part of an introduction to the reading of the principal scripture text could enhance rather than diminish the oral-aural transaction of the sermon, but even that potential should be evaluated carefully. Could not the same or better effect be accomplished by drawing a word picture in a verbal introduction to the reading of the text? Word pictures can help the hearers develop and use their powers of imagination—forming mental images from word descriptions. Visual aids, on the other hand, can be a crutch that contributes to the atrophy of imaginative powers.

[¶72] **The avoidance of imported visual teaching aids specific to the text**

and theme during the sermon moment can help to keep the community engaged in the oral-aural transaction of the preaching event and its goal of a word-based communal encounter with God.

There is always a visual setting for the preaching event. Sometimes it may be an occasional setting such as the chapel or assembly area of a hospital or independent living-assisted living-skilled nursing care center or the sights and sounds of nature at a public park or an encampment; perhaps an emergency arrangement in a warehouse, a basketball court, a reserve guard armory, a factory floor or office gathering place. But more commonly the visual setting for preaching will be a church worship space, designed specifically for Christian fellowship, prayer and praise with scripture, preaching, and sacrament. That's the setting of a community of faith and love gathered around the Altar/Table, the Baptistry/Font, and the Pulpit/Lectern/Ambo. This carefully designed setting along with the minister's visible sense of presence when standing, sitting, or moving among those functional/symbolic furnishings during the readings, sermon and sacraments are visual aids that support the oral communication of preaching and other liturgical speech.

Projected images and other visual aids *during the sermon* can only detract from that potent worship and preaching setting and vista which is its own visual and tactile aid. West 1997, 57-58, citing Paul Ricoeur and Ernst Fuchs, observes that the move from the reading of scripture to the preaching of the sermon constitutes nothing less than a return from the print culture to the oral-aural culture, that is, from the written record of God's spoken Word back to the Word of God as a spoken word. And West quotes Gerhard Ebeling to the effect that this transition does not normally happen through recitation (public reading or memorized performance), and I would add neither does it happen through printed handouts, turnover charts or videos. Willimon 2005, 32-33, also discusses the fact that the Bible is the written transcription of a message that was originally spoken proclamation and that the task of preaching is to reverse that order by transmitting the

written message of the Bible in spoken proclamation. Farmer 1942, Chapter II “The I-Thou Relationship,” especially 44 ff., discusses how human speech is the essential instrument for communicating the claims of the gospel that, when accepted, can establish and maintain the interpersonal relationship among people in community with God that constitutes salvation in the now, and how such an effect requires the personal presence of a speaker and how the use of an audio recording device to transmit the “speech” could not facilitate but would get in the way of interpersonal relationships among people and with God. The same is surely true of printed sermon outline handouts, even though the speaker is present and her lips are moving. Regarding the phrase “I-Thou” usually associated with the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965), Allen and Springstead 2007, 195-196, note that Buber’s work deeply influenced Protestant theology in the development of a new approach to revelation: “The revelation of God is no longer seen to be primarily propositions or statements. God is said to be one who is always a subject in relation to us. God is not an object of knowledge but one who is known only in encounter.” The influence of this theological shift in the understanding of revelation can be seen in homiletic theology, especially in Farmer 1942, where an appreciation of contemporary social psychology is evident and in Buttrick 1987 where an appreciation of the philosophy of phenomenology is present. In fact, it seems to me that Farmer anticipates by 40 years Buttrick’s development of a phenomenological approach to homiletic theology when he writes of “claim and shared meaning” in Chapter III, “Preaching as Personal Encounter.” Lowry 1997, 29, notes that according to Charles Rice, the fundamental intention of the sermon is to facilitate “an encounter.” Wilson 2007, 32, describes the purpose of preaching as an event intended to produce an experience of encounter with God:

The sermon is an intimate and personal event in a communal context with community-shaping power. Understood this way, it is God’s salvation breaking into the

world. Jesus said, “Whoever listens to you listens to me” (Luke 10:16).

Consequently, language may need to shift in order to begin and maintain a relationship with God, not just ideas. God is forming the church in Christ’s image. Listeners do not so much hear witness about Christ, they experience Christ’s love. They do not so much receive a summons to authentic life, as they experience anointing.

[¶73] **Attention should be called to the congregation’s part in helping to avoid distractions from the oral-aural transaction of preaching and to creative management of the needs of the hearing-impaired.**

Lischer 2001, 71-72, writing about the Image of God as the intimate, responsive relationship between God and humanity, states, citing Brunner 1939, that humanity recognizes its “I” of answerable responsibility in love only when it is addressed by God as a “Thou” (also referenced below [¶ 85]). Dargan 1904, 333, has a compelling quote from a sermon of Jean Charlier (1363-1429) about people who attend sermons to get more information about Christ but are not expecting to become more like Christ: “They...are like those of whom the apostle writes that they are ever learning and yet know nothing” (2 Tim. 3:7). Lischer 1981, as cited in Sensing 2003, 4-5, asserts that “theology must call for reclamation of the oral-aural nature of preaching...” Surely such a reclamation is hindered rather than helped by the use of printed sermon handouts, slide projections and other visual, tactile or audio distractions during the preaching moment. Further citations could be made from historic and contemporary literature on effective oral communication and effective pedagogy. The completion test may be an effective learning tool in studying for comprehensive final exams but should be banished once and for all from both the lecture hall and the preaching event at Sunday worship services. It can only be a distraction in the spoken word event of preaching which *must* be strictly oral to aural. Appropriate eye contact is a duty of hearers as well as speakers. If someone has a distracted inner compulsion to make a note of something during the preaching (e.g., turn on oven as soon as I get home), let them do it quietly

and unobtrusively in the margins of the announcements or order of service handout. Other than such note making to dissipate one's mental distraction, people should be encouraged to put aside all reading and writing materials during the preaching/hearing portion of the service. Lowry 1997, 114-115, alludes to the question of how the preaching can be an oral-aural experience for the hearing-impaired persons who participate in the ritual of worship. And he asserts that the best way requires the help of a signing interpreter: "It is not only the case that 'faith comes from what is heard' (Romans 10:17 NRSV), faith also is nurtured, challenged, confirmed from hearing—whether that hearing moves directly from mouth to ear, or from mouth through ear to signing hand to eye. It is an oral-aural experience, quite different from literacy. As the theologian Tom Driver once put it: 'Ritual loves not paper'" (Driver 1991, 218 and 1998, 212 and 215).

[¶74] **The practice of inviting people to follow along in their Bibles or pew Bibles during the scripture reading and the preaching at the chief Sunday morning service is of questionable appropriateness and effectiveness for the same reasons as is the distribution of fill-in-the-blanks sermon outlines.**

I think that Bonhoeffer 1975, 157-158, painted with too broad a brush and reflected a common confusion of sermon and Bible lecture: "Basically there is no difference between a Bible study and a sermon." And he tells his homiletics students that the goal of the individual sermon is that the text...rather than any feature of the sermon might be remembered and retained by the congregation and that "It is a good sign when the congregation begin to open up their Bibles and follow the text" and that "the preacher should...educate his congregation to follow the sermon with open Bibles." It seems to me that it is rather the goal of the sermon that people's lives will be changed, edified, disturbed, or comforted by the oral-aural encounter with Jesus Christ and his gospel in the preached Word, not that "the text...might be remembered and retained." Surely

every Christian should be engaged in Bible study in groups and individually as well as in the daily discipleship of personal prayer and meditative Bible reading. But the Sunday worship service is not the time or place! As mentioned above [¶ 18, ¶ 23], Bonhoeffer 1975, 128, asserts that with the introduction of the Bible in worship the text begins to walk among the congregation; and he also states, 126, that the preached word is Christ himself walking through his congregation. But surely this mystical walking of the text and of the Christ will generally be blocked rather than facilitated by the rustling of Bibles and printed handouts among the people. It is by way of the oral/aural transaction of public reading and preaching and hearing that the text and the Christ get up and get out there and walk around among the people. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 109-111, with citations from Eberhard Bethge's *Gesammelte Schriften* 1961, discuss at some length Bonhoeffer's thoughts concerning proclamation as the incarnate Christ himself, the preached Christ as the historical Christ, the incarnate One who bears the sins of the world, the initiative and action of the Word itself with help by the Holy Spirit among the people, in rising from the text and its proclamation to walk among the people; and the minister's responsibility to preach in a way that does not obstruct that movement of the Christ among his people but rather allows that movement. As to what the preacher can and must do to avoid blocking the intention of the text and the Christ to move among the congregation and into their lives, according to Bonhoeffer, it is that the preacher must use the Bible properly in three places: the study, the pulpit, and personal prayer life. Most important, according to Bonhoeffer, is the proper use of the Bible in the pulpit, that is, for proclamation and not for telling stories of one's own spiritual experience or personal experience with the Bible. The Bible itself will do its job in the congregation when the preacher respects the Bible's ability to do that. To that end Bonhoeffer suggests that the preacher begin sermon preparation with prayer over the open text asking the Holy Spirit to speak to and through

the text and the preacher: “Come, God, and receive men (people) through your words that you have allowed to come from my mouth.” On the other hand, Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 114-115, suggest a discriminating occasional use of the practice of asking the congregation to follow along with open Bibles. But I am not convinced by their argument. Let preaching be preaching and let Bible lecture be Bible lecture.

[¶75] **It is a challenge for preachers who follow a lectionary to keep in appropriate balance the intentions of the liturgical calendar, the original setting and intention of the scriptural text, the gospel of temporal and eternal salvation, the goal of addressing the word of scripture to the present needs and issues of church and world, and the comprehensive purposes of corporate worship.**

Skudlarek's 1981, 33-34, and Bonneau's 1998 elucidation of the guiding principle of Scripture selection in the *Lectionary for Mass* being directed toward setting the liturgical scene for the presentation of the paschal mystery in the Eucharist is clearly in accord with what West 1997, 8-10, calls the “Catholic liturgical paradigm.” And that, along with West's exposition of the different hermeneutic trajectory that is launched by the “Protestant liturgical paradigm,” i.e., the rehearsal or recital of salvation history as a setting for the proclamation of the culmination of that history in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, might suggest the question of whether a lectionary that is open to all of canonical Scripture, such as *The Open Bible Lectionary* in Book II of this volume, can serve either the Catholic liturgical paradigm or the Protestant liturgical paradigm, much less serve both. I think the answer is yes to either and yes to both. I do not mean to dismiss or deny West's distinction between the hermeneutical trajectories that tend to influence preaching in the Catholic paradigm worship setting and preaching in the Protestant paradigm worship setting, but I do mean to issue a challenge to “Catholic” and “Protestant” preachers to work toward the melding of these two paradigms and to begin by acknowledging

that both will be best served by embracing each or any section of canonical Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, as a possible source of selections for reading and exposition in Sunday worship and to make every sermon an appropriate complement to the eucharistic presentation of the paschal mystery—Catholic paradigm—and to make every sermon a proclamation of salvation through the Christ event in the context of the biblical saga of salvation history—Protestant paradigm—while ensuring that every sermon is consistent with and faithful to a sound exegesis of the principal Scripture passage of the day. Managing such a balance of faithfulness to a combined Catholic/Protestant liturgical paradigm along with significant attention to responsible biblical exegesis will be a huge challenge for preachers, as is indicated in West’s 1997, 186-187, concluding discussion on the struggle of some Protestants to “work the memory out of the lectionary” so as to do “biblical preaching” rather than “liturgical preaching” but in which they succeed in a hybrid of “lectionary preaching” which is neither clearly biblical nor clearly liturgical. Ritschl’s 1963, 101, definition of the hour of corporate worship as “the time of the real presence of the exalted Lord in the assembly of the believers through the Holy Spirit” seems appropriate to both the Protestant and the Catholic paradigms.

[¶76-77] **A possible parallel or analogy to my suggestion of a hermeneutic in preaching that stems from a mediation between the Catholic liturgical paradigm and the Protestant liturgical paradigm (West 1997) is Ricoeur’s 1995, 61-67, discussion of why he prefers mediation between the sacred and the kerygma to the iconoclasm of a non-religious religion inspired by nihilistic scientism and tended toward by Bultmann and Bonhoeffer. (I reference Ricoeur on that assertion again below [¶ 82].)**

I wish Ricoeur had left Bonhoeffer and Bultmann out of that discussion and impugned only “nihilistic scientism.” Bonhoeffer and Bethge were groping in the direction of just such a mediation between the sacred and the historical or worldly. Bultmann was doing the same,

especially in his popular lectures and in his responses to critics and others who misread him and his motivations. And, to bring another theologian into the picture, Borg's personal spiritual journey, reported in several of his popular books, is a story of growing into that mediation between the historical and the sacred. Ricoeur has misconstrued Bonhoeffer's intentions here. According to a citation of Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's devoted friend and life-long posthumous editor, in Fant 1975, 78: "The isolated use and handing down of the famous term 'religionless Christianity' has made Bonhoeffer the champion of an undialectical shallow modernism which obscures all that he wanted to tell us about the living God." Fant indicates that Bethge dislikes the term religionless Christianity altogether because of the false impression which it conveys concerning Bonhoeffer's thought and that he prefers the term "nonreligious interpretation of biblical principles." Fant, 77-78, cites passages in a sermon and a lecture of Bonhoeffer's that help to clarify what Bonhoeffer meant by his assertion "The Christian religion as a religion is not of God:" "The cross of Christ destroyed the equation religion equals happiness...With that the difference between Christianity and religions is clear; here is grace, there is happiness, here is the cross, there the crown, here God, there man" (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 20] in relation to a discussion of the understanding of myth and meaning and the interpretive intention of Bultmann's demythologization hermeneutic). Another help in understanding why Bonhoeffer thought it so urgent to develop a nonreligious understanding of biblical principles or a nonreligious interpretation of Christianity or a worldly preaching can be seen in his *Ethics* 1955, 196-207, in a section "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres,"... "one divine, holy, supernatural, and Christian, the other worldly, profane, natural, and un-Christian," wherein he notes that "This view becomes dominant for the first time in the Middle Ages, and for the second time in the pseudo-Protestant thought of the period after the Reformation." Bonhoeffer insists that there is only one

sphere, that of the world created, loved, redeemed, and reconciled by God in Jesus Christ. Thus, when Bonhoeffer talks about a religious Christianity or a religious interpretation of the Bible he means a Christianity and a biblical hermeneutic that are still largely and pervasively infected, corrupted, abused, distorted, and confused by “thinking in terms of two spheres.”

[¶78] **Bonhoeffer and Bethge wrestled with the question of what function the church and its offices might have in a worldly Christianity, that is, when people of the world and of the churches turn from the churches and their facilities and clergy to “being spiritual without being religious.”**

Some sense of Bonhoeffer’s thoughts and readings on the meaning of worldliness in major philosophical thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries in relation to the influence and perceptions of classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and modernism can be seen in his 9 March 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge, 1972, 228-232, especially 229-231 (also referenced in n. 2 [in the 32nd of 34 bullet points] in relation to Diogenes Allen’s discussion of the waxing and waning of the historical dimension in approaches to scripture interpretation among Christians). Bonhoeffer 1972, 279, indicates that a pragmatic/historical warrant for entertaining or generating the notion of a non-religious Christianity is the fact that people in general are becoming religionless and incapable of being religious in any true or deep sense of the word. On the other hand, he also indicates that it is becoming less and less possible to communicate the Christian faith to people in words. Some experience of fellowship/community and action/service is a necessary part of that communication. And Bonhoeffer 1972, 278-289, in an exchange of letters with Eberhard Bethge, reveals his wrestling with some of the largely intractable questions and problems involved in conceiving a religionless Christianity. Bonhoeffer and Bethge seem to be groping after something

similar to the late 20th – early 21st centuries notion of being spiritual without being religious—hardly a new idea but with a renewed flare-up in these times. Bonhoeffer and Bethge had a sense that some new ways must be found to fulfill the essential functions of traditional church life and action. Bethge’s letter of 3 June 1944, in Bonhoeffer 1972, 316-318, has a short paragraph at the bottom of 317 and top of 318 that raises theoretical and practical issues rather bluntly as to what must be done about the situation on the ground if there is to be Christianity that is worldly and not religious, that is, spiritual in a worldly way rather than spiritual in a religious way. Bethge asks concerning the vision of a non-religious or worldly Christianity “So, what are we to do about making particular claims on ‘ground’ in the world? What is the role of the cult and the prophet (i.e., the religious pattern and structure of assembly, worship, ritual, preaching, and ministry)? Finally, what is the significance of the Christian tradition in which we stand?” Bonhoeffer 1972, 329, was about to address these questions from Bethge when he had to break off his letter of 8 June 1944 with a promise to say more tomorrow, but he doesn’t get around to sketching out his vision of the future role, function, and configuration of the church and its clergy until the appended “Outline for a Book,” 380-383, which I discuss below [¶ 80].

[¶79] **Bonhoeffer grapples with what it means in Jesus Christ to live in a world come of age that gets along without living under a domineering, autocratic, micromanaging God by living as one who has come alongside a retiring, self-effacing and longsuffering God, and to live fully in the world as it is rather than living as one who is distinguished from the world as it is by the fact of being a religious person.**

Bonhoeffer 1972 reiterates, 341, 344, 346, in his letters of 30 June and 8 July 1944, his displeasure with trends in the “world come of age” of pushing God out of the public sphere and the centers of human thought and action and relegating God and the church’s ministry to the private sphere of personal problems and the boundary or limit issues of death, the afterlife, and

the eschaton (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 22]). And, 359-361, in the letter of 16 July 1944, Bonhoeffer has further citations from modern theorists in theology, politics, ethics, philosophy, and science on the process of humankind coming of age, that is, becoming autonomous in the sense of functioning in all arenas of human thought and endeavor apart from God as a working hypothesis. Then, 359-361, he has a few thoughts on how it is the faith of biblical Christianity that makes it possible to live before God in a world that according to natural law set up as international law, per Grotius, goes its way *etsi deus non daretur*, ‘even if there were no God,’ including this paragraph, 361:

Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man’s religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the *deus ex machina*. The Bible (on the other hand) directs man to God’s *powerlessness and suffering*; only the suffering God can help. To that extent we may say that the development towards the world’s coming of age outlined above, which has done away with a false conception of God, opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness. This will probably be the starting-point for our ‘secular interpretation.’ (parenthesis and emphasis added)

Perhaps Bonhoeffer was inspired in part by the language of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:1-10.

Further, Bonhoeffer 1972, 361-362, in the 18 July continuation of the letter of 16 July, 1944, goes on about what it means to live as one who joins God’s suffering and weakness in a godless world as the person that Christ has created in us by way of conversion. And he gives examples from the New Testament of people who were changed by being drawn to the side of the humiliated and suffering and powerless God in Christ and being freed to live the ‘secular’ life as changed persons, “as ones who have been freed from false religious obligations and inhibitions.” And he explains that the godlessness of the world must not be concealed but exposed to an unexpected light. “The world that has come of age is more godless, and perhaps for that very reason nearer to God, than the world before its coming of age.” What this means to Bonhoeffer in his own spiritual quest for a life of faith is expressed in his letter of 21 July 1944, 369-370, written after the failure

of the assassination plot against Hitler:

I discovered later (i.e., Bonhoeffer discovered after reassessing the impact of his 1937 book *Nachfolge*—“*The Cost of Discipleship*” 1948), and I’m still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia* (repentance, conversion, change of heart and mind); and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer. 45!). How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God’s sufferings through a life of this kind?

[¶80] **Bonhoeffer 1972, 381-383, in his “Outline for a Book” of not more than 100 pages, spells out further the meaning in Christ of faith in a self-suffering God; and then he finally gets around to suggesting some possible features of the shape and function of the church and its offices in a worldly or religionless Christianity:**

(b) Who is God? Not in the first place an abstract belief in God, in his omnipotence etc.. That is not a genuine experience of God, but a partial extension of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformational human life is given in the fact that ‘Jesus is there only for others’ (rather than for himself and others). His ‘being there for others’ is the experience of transcendence. It is only this ‘being there for others’, maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a ‘religious’ relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable – that is not authentic transcendence – but our relation to God is a new life in ‘existence for others’, through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation. God in human form – not, as in oriental religions, in animal form, monstrous, chaotic, remote, and terrifying, not in conceptual forms of the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc., nor yet in the Greek divine-human form of ‘man in himself’, but ‘the man for others’, and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.

Also, in that book outline, Bonhoeffer, 382, promises for a third or fourth time to answer Bethge’s question of what is to become of the church and its worship and preaching/teaching/priestly ministry in a worldly or non-religious Christianity: “(d) Cultus. (Details to follow later, in

particular on cultus and ‘religion’.)” Then, 382-383, in a preview of the proposed book’s conclusion, he indicates that in a non-religious or worldly Christianity, “The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations,” (as is done wherever ‘separation of church and state’ is truly implemented) “or possibly engage in some secular calling” (as is done in some so-called ‘tent-making’ ministries after the example of Paul and some of his colleagues). Then he goes on to outline briefly some of the basic characteristics of such a secular church and such a worldly ministry. The foundational observation of this vision of the shape of the church and its fellowship, worship, teaching, and proclamation is that the church must exhibit the meaning of a worldly or non-religious Christianity is that the church and its clergy must lead by example and that it is the church’s example of existing for others, that is, for the world, that gives power to the church’s words. This vision suggests to me that the recent (late 20th – early 21st centuries) movement in homiletic theology toward inductive and narrative structuring of sermons can be validated and strengthened by a shift in the church’s own narrative along the lines of Bonhoeffer’s vision of a church that leads by example in living a secular life in Christ for the sake of the world that God so loved.

[¶81] **But a more realistic hope than Bonhoeffer’s vision of a religionless Christianity would be a vision of an eventual common social order among the major enduring religious/ethnic/cultural traditions of the world, a social order that would fully accommodate and support the respective social ethic of each religious tradition.**

Bonhoeffer’s notion of being Christian without being religious, along with the now popular sentiment of being spiritual without being religious, may be a bridge too far for the realities of history. Borg 2003, 219, has an illuminating paragraph in his discussion of the major enduring

religions in terms of the “internal core of each in which they have much in common, and the external form of each in which their differences stand out, along with a popular contemporary discussion of being spiritual without being religious, that is, without being associated with any institutional or organized religion:

But the contrast between spirituality and religion is both unnecessary and unwise. To use an analogy I owe to Huston Smith, religion is to spirituality as institutions of learning are to education. One can learn about the world, become educated, without schools, universities, and books, but it is like reinventing the wheel in every generation. Institutions of learning are the way education gets traction in history; so also religion (its external forms) is the way spirituality gains traction in history. (n. 14: For the whole point, see Smith 2001) Religion—its external forms—not just spirituality, matters. Its forms are vessels of spirituality, mediators of the sacred and the way.

Perhaps one way to think further about both a worldly Christianity (Bonhoeffer) and a world of religious freedom and religious commonality/pluralism (Borg) is to consider the notion of a common core or universal ordering of human society and personal responsibility that would incorporate contributions from the ethical studies of the major enduring religious traditions (those traditions discussed as the enduring major faiths in Borg 2001 and 2003) including from Christian ethical studies such as the orders (God-ordained structures of human society) outlined, “proof-texted,” and discussed in Brunner 1937, 291-567, and in Bonhoeffer 1955, 207-213; 286-292, to wit:

- Work/labor/business/economic systems
- Marriage and family/sexual ethics
- Government/civil order/the state
- Church/religions/spiritual communities

The idea that a religiously plural society could move from a peaceful but ever-tense co-existence to a genuine consensus social order is not new. But it seems to me that Borg’s 2003 thoughts on

the core commonalities and formal differences of the major enduring religions could help in discussions aimed at moving closer to such a consensus social order. It is notable that the biblically based orders of human society listed above lay out a bare skeleton of major departments of social organization but lack a separate category of general education and any mention of the character and values that should shape the content of each division or order of a social structure. Certain kinds of training and education have always taken place under each of the five listed orders of society, and cooperation and division of labor and responsibility on training and educating among some of the orders are necessarily in continual flux and renegotiation. But primary, secondary, post-secondary, and advanced general and career education and training compose such a large element in modern/postmodern societies that it may need to be considered as a sixth order of societal organization, one that would be difficult to “proof text” from any religious tradition. But these omissions and open questions are the very matters that moderate representatives of the major enduring religions could discuss in a quest to identify areas of agreement and disagreement and negotiate areas of common endeavor and areas of live-and-let-live while continuing to grow in mutual understanding of each other. Of course, extremist positions and movements within each of the enduring major religions, such as “Christian Nationalism” or its more extreme form in the seven domination mountains of “The New Apostolic Reformation,” would not come on board with any discussions of the parameters of a possible common social order, but that should not stop the moderate majority in each of the major enduring religions from trying to find common ethical ground on which to order their shared “secular” society.

[¶82] **The dynamic dialectic and interplay between Christian proclamation (human words) and Christian sacrament (sacred symbols) effectually**

liberates and empowers, by grace through faith, persons and communities to live for God and for others rather than for the self or for the institution.

A sermon by Ronald Knox (1888-1957) reprinted in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 151-156, has a view of Christ's humanity as summed up in a paragraph, 155-156, that resonates with Bonhoeffer's ideas of Christ as the consistent man for others who mystically joined us humans to himself such that we are all empowered and liberated by grace through faith to be persons for others and not for ourselves, so that the church is mystically empowered by grace through faith to be the body of Christ and to live and work for the world and not for itself. Johnson 1999, 349-350, shows that, according to Paul in the opening chapters of Romans, it is the gift of faith to recognize that one's justification in existence is not self-established but comes from God, the Other, that sets one free from the sin of self-justification and makes one free to follow Christ in living (and dying!?) for the Other and for others rather than for self. Bonhoeffer thought that Bultmann's attempt to have Christianity without the miracles and other pre-scientific perspectives in the Bible was wrong headed. As mentioned above [¶ 76-77], Ricoeur thought that Bultmann's program of demythologization tended toward a non-religious religion which for Ricoeur meant non-sacred, non-sacramental religion, which sounds a lot like Bonhoeffer's non-religious or worldly witness to the gospel. Ricoeur 1995, 63-64, asserts that humanity is simply not possible without the sacred, and he notes, 67, that preaching and sacraments in dialectic tension and rhythm are the way that Christianity has experienced or expressed the subtle equilibrium between the iconoclastic virtualities of proclamation and the symbolic resurgence of the sacred in the sacraments. But neither Bultmann nor Bonhoeffer ever proposes a Christianity without the sacraments and a sense of connection with the sacred. A Christ-centered (paschal) hermeneutic with respect to all of Scripture (salvation history) means that any passage of

Scripture can be the principal reading for an expository sermon that meets the above challenge as well as the challenges in previous paragraphs of this Chapter.

[¶83] **The distinction between West’s 1997 “Protestant liturgical paradigm” (rehearsal of salvation history) and his “Catholic liturgical paradigm” (presentation of the paschal mystery) cannot be a rigid line of demarcation.**

As is written in *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981), Article 10, “The spoken word of God brings to mind the history of salvation; the Eucharist embodies it in the sacramental signs of the liturgy” (Hoffman, ed. 1991, 130; also cited in Horace T. Allen 1983b, 15-16). The same perspective is expressed in *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (1963), Article 35.2 in Hoffman 1991, 16, or Abbott 1966, 149-150; and in *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981), Article 24 in Hoffman 1991, 133; and in Vagaggini 1976, 3-18, on “The General Background of the Liturgy: Revelation as Sacred History,” especially in the “The Great Phases of This History” outlined on pp. 10-11. As Bonneau 1998, 26, has noted, the Vatican II Council sought to sweep away centuries of cultural accretions (clutter) that would prevent people from experiencing the Sunday service as a celebration of the mystery of Christ, of his death and resurrection as the *fulfillment of salvation history*. Protestants may rehearse or recite the history of salvation in Sunday worship (West 1997 the Protestant paradigm). Catholics *celebrate* the *fulfillment* of it! And while I have listed Fuller 1957 and 1987 as an example of defining liturgical preaching too narrowly, I also see in 1957, 21-22, that rehearsal of salvation history in scripture and preaching is part and parcel with setting the stage for the eucharistic presentation of the paschal mystery in his definition of liturgical preaching. And his seriousness about expository preaching based on thorough exegetical work is clear from his article “Preparing the Homily” in *Preaching the Lectionary*, Third Edition 2006 (article first published in the Second Edition 1982). Deiss 1976,

288, discusses a Christological reading of the Old Testament. But caution should be taken against imposing a Christological view upon every episode in Scripture or seeing a Christ figure in every character that suffers undeservedly or who voluntarily makes a personal sacrifice for the sake of others.

[¶84] **The ambiguous and often questioned concept of salvation history can be salvaged by careful interpretation and the use of alternative terminology.**

Some recent currents in theology have called into question a too casual and linear use of the expressions “salvation history” and “history of salvation,” but have allowed for a more existential understanding of the recapitulation of salvation history in worship. For example: Tillich 1963a, 362-364, discusses some problems due to misinterpretations and abuses of the term “history of salvation” and would prefer for purposes of his discussion of THE DYNAMICS OF HISTORY AND THE NEW BEING in his chapter on THE KINGDOM OF GOD WITHIN HISTORY the expression “manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history.” Tillich goes on to discuss what it can and cannot mean to call Jesus Christ “the center of history.” The question also arises in part from the fact that a huge part of the biblical saga of God with the world and humankind, that is, Creation and Fall, is, in fact, *pre*-history. Perhaps the expression “economy of redemption,” a phrase which Thompson 1971, 48, uses in discussing conceptions of the Mass which gained prominence in the Middle Ages, would be more agreeable than “history of salvation.” Theologians may quibble about whether to speak of the theology of salvation or the story of salvation or the sacred history or the history of salvation or the economy of redemption. This questioning is fair enough. But Vagaggini 1976, 12, notes that situating the liturgy in the sacred history involves recognizing that the sacred history of God’s work in creation, his dealing

with Israel and the church, and the goal of final consummation toward which the sacred history is aimed from the very beginning, is a theology of general history; and a recognition that the sacred history is not only linear but also unitary. The biblical sacred history is summed up and contained in the moment of faithful reception, transformation, and renewal through proclamation and the sacramental freedom of the Spirit in the assembly, the mystery of Christ's presence in the eucharistic service. This would seem to cohere with Bultmann's existential concept of the eschaton in his *The Presence of Eternity* and other writings, as opposed to a temporal concept in which the eschaton is yet to be. Dodd's realized eschatology posited in his *The Parables of the Kingdom* and other writings, is also necessarily existential since this material and broken world is still limping along. That is, if we are now living existentially in the time of realized eschatology, it is clearly also time with a linear dimension in which the kingdom of God is not yet perfected in practice. Farley 1996, 165-175, presents a more dialectic and less linear paradigm for preaching in worship as a discourse on redemption in the world of gospel. As von Allmen 1965, 21-41, makes clear, conceiving the Sunday worship cult as a recapitulation of the history of salvation even to the point of structuring the order of service to follow the outline history of salvation, is not very effectual if the worshipers do not see and experience the rhythm and dynamics of the outline of salvation history (creation, fall, redemption, new life, and hope of final consummation) in their own life journey and day to day ups and downs and in the life of their church and world. Von Allmen significantly points to the recap, or restore-the-top (head) variation of recapitulation. That prompts me to note that during the rubber shortage of World War II, the process of recapping or retreading tires was extensively developed and used. Worship as a recapping of salvation history is not merely to rehearse or summarize or recite or review or dramatize the story of Jesus' life and work or the whole biblical saga of God's saving activity in

history, but it is to restore the top, that is to reinstall Christ as the head of our wayward lives, our wandering church, and our lost world. Von Allmen refers to this as the theological sense of recapitulating the history of salvation in worship, that is, reestablishing the relationship of the worshiping community to Christ in his threefold ministry of prophet, priest, and king. Just as writers in the tradition of the Catholic worship paradigm speak of the actualization of the sacrifice of Christ in the life of the gathered community and in the individual lives of the faithful worshipers through the celebration of the Mass, so Ricoeur 1995, 179, of the Protestant liturgical tradition, writes of the reactualization of salvation in the worship experience.

[¶85] **The continual (again and again) revitalization of the personal faith of individual Christians takes place in the context of a worshiping community that is continually forming and reforming itself by way of its ongoing conversation with the living Christ (spiritual Word) and the record (written Word) of the church's memory of Christ's time of incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth.**

Thus, Christian preaching has a dual character and function as a communal activity in which the church is forming itself as a community that makes a witness and an invitation to the world by its own presence and life in the world and in which its own individual members are continually addressed, persuaded, transformed and built up by the redemptive word of God's healing work in the Spirit.

While the discussion of the actualization or re-actualization of the paschal mystery and the restoration of Christ as the head in the lives of the faithful seems to suggest a transaction with each individual worshiper, Lischer 2001, 76-92, proposes a more specifically corporate function of the church's worship and preaching: the continual formation and reformation of the church as a faith community, in which preaching consists of all the ways that the church talks to itself in this formative process, including the language of hymns, prayers, readings, anthems, various kinds of internal and external ministry and mission, and gospel sermons which should often be

narrative in form, not so much as contemporary stories that exemplify or illustrate a biblical teaching, or develop the truth or revelation of such a teaching inductively (per Craddock), and not so much as a syntactical approach that communicates a theological message in narrative form as a sequential development over a time trajectory as opposed to a structural development in a spatial aggregation (per Lowry), but rather narrative in the sense of telling and retelling the faith story of God's activity over historical time and in the present time, as well as the story of the church's activity pursuant to, in response to, and as an instrument of God's activity. Lischer's perspective on worship and preaching as a community forming and reforming itself by singing and speaking and praying together about the redemptive work of God in historical memory and in contemporary experience, brings to mind the theological ground laid out in G. Ernest Wright 1952 which is subtitled *Biblical Theology as Recital*, wherein the reciting of God's redemptive work in historical events, whether in an Israelite festival or a Christian worship service, does not exclude but facilitates individual encounter with God (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 17]).

Here, I conflate a passage in Wright, 28, with the perspective of Lischer discussed above: The worshiper listens to and sings the recital and by means of historical memory and identification participates, so to speak, in the original events. Then facing his own situation he confesses his faith and his sin; he seeks God's forgiveness and that of his fellow worshipers; he seeks God's direction; and he renews the vows of his covenant, a personal or individual renewal that takes place in the context of a covenant community that has been founded by the redemptive activity of God and continues to form and reform itself through rehearsal of God's redemptive activity. My paraphrastic conflation of Wright and Lischer ends here. Lischer, 76-92, spells out further ramifications of his perspective on the function of imagination in preaching in Chapter VI "Preaching as the Church's Language," where he points toward a recovery of the New Testament

model of preaching as a corporate function of the church forming itself as a faith community, as distinguished from preaching as the persuasion or encouragement of individual persons as in “the turn to the subject” in recent preaching history. On the other hand, community formation and individual persuasion cannot be completely separated, as is indicated in Massey’s 1980, 28, statement, under the heading of *The Shaping of Community Through Preaching*, that part of the function of the church’s worship and preaching is to “elicit faith and sustain a people during their procession and mission.” The community into which Lischer sees the church forming itself through its communal preaching is intended to be a community of contrast with the way of the world, which community constitutes the church’s witness and invitation to the world. Thus, Lischer, 91-92, concludes:

When the sermon’s language and imagery reflect the world of the living church and when its purpose is formative-over-time rather than persuasive-in-an-instant, such questions (as whether to begin the sermon with the text or with present experience) lose their relevance. As recognition of the church’s existence as a contrast-society continues to grow, contemporary preaching will move from *event to formation*, *illustration to narrative*, and *translation to performance*. These moves do not represent new rhetorical skills to be mastered by the preacher, but a new perspective from which to view the entire enterprise of the church’s ceaseless witness to Jesus Christ.

Not that the view of preaching as an event of personal encounter in which God is present and active and the view of preaching as an ongoing action of the church in forming itself are mutually exclusive; both are alluded to in the following statement of Wilson 2007, 32, “The sermon is an intimate and personal event in a communal context with community-shaping power.” And as Lischer had indicated, 71-72, in the chapter preceding the one referenced above, the possibility for a pastor and congregation to do preaching as a continuing work of communal self-formation hinges on an event or events in which “humanity recognizes its ‘I’ of answerable responsibility in love...when it is addressed by God as a ‘Thou’” (also cited above [¶ 73]).

[¶86] **Christian worship is truly and fully effectual when the economy of redemption or history of salvation rehearsed in Scripture reading, preaching, prayer and praise (Protestant paradigm) becomes an evocative symbol of the worshiper's own history and experience of personal redemption, and when the redemptive power of the sacrifice of Christ reenacted in the celebration of the Thankful Meal along with prayer and praise (Catholic paradigm) becomes an evocative symbol of the worshiper's transformed or renewed life of sacrificial service among the people of God's church and world.**

Instructive for both the Catholic and the Protestant paradigms is Driver's 1998, 79-127, development of the concept of ritual as performance and, 131-191, the transformative power of ritual acting-out in Bible study classes, referencing Wink 1980, and Christian worship; and he notes, 190: "Because it is performance and not verbal description or exhortation, ritual brings the far-away, the long-ago, and the not-yet into the here-and-now." Driver, 133, discovers anthropological light on the ritual power of a dramatic order of worship and cites Roy Rappaport's essay "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual" based on his research on native rites in Papua New Guinea, in which he (Rappaport) declares that a liturgical order "does more than *remind* individuals of an underlying [cosmic] order. It establishes that order" (brackets original). And, 112 and 244-245 in notes 106 and 107, he discusses the relationship of the rituals, myths, and sacred objects and places of ancient religions referencing the perspectives of W. R. Smith as well as Durkheim, Langer, and others, to the effect that the myths and stories are generated by the rituals rather than vice-versa and that rather than rituals being developed around sacred objects, the objects are constituted as sacred during the process of ritualization rather than prior to it. Driver sums up some of the principles of effectual ritual for Christian worship by listing "Fifteen Maxims for the Planning of Christian Rituals." He describes, 213-216, the setting and elements of Christian performance ritual worship as (1) *Space* (2) *Time* (3) *Word* (4) *Rhythm*.

And, 216-222, he describes 17 actions that might belong to a rhythmic sacrament of Holy Communion. Ritschl 1963, 89, seems to go even further: “The worship service does not reflect upon the ‘history of salvation’ but is in itself part of it. The hour of worship is not a ‘drama,’ but the time of the real presence of the servant Lord...” Ritschl seems to express an extreme or reactionary Protestant perspective when he writes, 94, that “A worship service can never be a parable of a ‘truth’ which lies behind it. It is neither a drama, nor a melodrama, nor an ‘opera,’ as it might seem to be in many churches; but it is a *scene* in the drama of the history of God with his people.” Ritschl is surely correct to insist that the drama of God’s saving history with his people is ongoing in the present service of worship. But, just so, he did not succeed in expunging the images of drama and history from his perspective on liturgy. He, 113-114, introduces the German term *Vergegenwärtigung* and writes that “it means a ‘making real and present’ of acts in the past, which are relevant for the future, a ‘recapitulative anticipation.’” Perhaps Ritschl was reacting to 20th century vestiges of an allegorical understanding of the Mass as a drama of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, with each vestment, each element, and each gesture of the priest taken to symbolize some aspect of Christ, a view which according to Thompson 1971, 44, originated with Alcuin (d. 804) and was brought into prominence by his pupil Almaricus (d. ca. 850). And, in a similar way, Bonneau 1998, 26 and passim, Sloyan, passim, and the Vatican II documents make clear that framing the liturgy as the re-presentation of the paschal mystery, that is, the actualization of the sacrifice of Christ through the feast of the Eucharist, is only effectual when we the worshipers—we the faithful—experience the redemptive power of the dimension of sacrifice in our lives and in the life of God’s church and world, that is, when we accept our own crosses and take them up and follow Christ into the life of humble service and bold witness in a world of suffering and sin.

[¶87] **A sense of what actually happens in the worship experience of individual worshipers and worshipping communities is enhanced when one opens the mind and heart to the element of drama, ritual, poetry, art, sacrifice, symbol, language, and action.**

Seeing the order of worship in terms of drama, reenactment, rehearsal, review, recapitulation, recital, or re-presentation of the outline history, or the economy, of salvation contributes to rather than detracts from the restoration of Christ as the head of the church as in the Protestant paradigm or the actualizing of Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist as in the Catholic paradigm. Both paradigms partake of the Hebrew mind for which the recollection of the past means that what is recalled becomes a present reality which in turn controls the will, as noted by Troeger 1983, 163, citing *The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible* 1962, Vol. 3, 344. Lowry's 1985, 80-81, discussion of poetry preceding prose, aesthetic knowing and language preceding discursive knowing and language, citing Austin Farrer—"exact prose abstracts from reality, symbol presents it"—and Amos Wilder—"before the message must be the vision, before the sermon the hymn, before the prose the poem"—and John Ciardi and Miller Williams—"For the poem is not a statement but a performance of forces," and "not an essay on life but a reenactment"—points not only to the importance of metaphor, image, and story in preaching, which I discuss in Chapter IV where [¶ 57] I reference Wilson's 2007, 133, identification of image development as a particular form of sermon structuring along with the older form of points with illustrations and the newer form of narrative plotting. Lowry's discussion also points to the necessity of viewing worship as drama whether experienced in the Catholic paradigm or the Protestant paradigm (West) or, preferably, both paradigms at the same time in the same church. All of these concepts and images are helpful to me. Thompson 1971, 234-235, describes how the English reformers, in the Prayer Books of King Edward VI, rather than abolish the Canon, "which refers to the body of

prayers surrounding the consecration,” as Luther had done, simply expunged its reference to the Mass as the sacrifice of the people or as reenactment of the sacrifice of Christ. It seems, according to Thompson’s 1971, 99, account, that Luther’s reaction was to that part of the Canon that turns the Mass into a sacrifice.

[¶88] **The teaching of a sacrificial dimension in Christian worship is documented in biblical translations and commentaries and in liturgical studies in both Catholic and Protestant traditions.**

If anyone thinks that a Lutheran or any other Protestant cannot admit of a sacrificial dimension in the presentation of the paschal mystery at the heart of the eucharistic (thankful) service of the Lord’s Supper, let her at least consider the explanation of this historical development by a Swedish Lutheran scholar and bishop in Brilioth 1965a, 42-48, 84-90, 130-133, 137-141, 282-285; and Thompson’s 1971, 95-105, discussion of Luther’s reform of the Mass including his distinction between a *sacrificium*, a sacrifice offered by people to God, and a *beneficium*, a generous gift of God to people, where Brilioth is cited on Luther. Consider also the contemporary language translation of 1 Corinthians 11:26 by a Protestant minister, Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*: “What you must solemnly realize is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master.” Phifer 1965, 42, discusses the notion that the emphasis on making the sacrifice of Christ real and present through the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is an historical development connected with the falling away of the themes of resurrection feast and anticipation of the eschatological feast resulting from the lengthening delay of the latter. Maxwell 1949, 75, discusses Luther’s subjective reinterpretation of the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist: we enter into Christ’s sacrifice, offer ourselves up together with Christ. Thompson 1971, 7,

discusses Justin Martyr's (d. about C.E. 165) 4-fold conception of the Lord's Supper: remembrance, sacrifice, fellowship, thanksgiving. Old 1998b (vol. 2) 21-28, discusses the early church's teachings, citing specifically Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386), on the effectualness of its dramatizations or reenactments of Christ's sacrifice in the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper and how these understandings were influenced by the mystery cults that were prevalent. Deloria 1988, xiv, writing of the universal significance of the visions of Black Elk, a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, refers to "the theme of sacrifice so important to all religions."

[¶89] **Whether Christian worship is structured as a preaching service with readings, prayers, hymns, anthems, and occasional sacraments incorporated for getting the people involved in setting the mood and scene for the preaching or, conversely, it is structured as a setting for the Thankful Meal shared in response to the preached Word, it ends up being a dramatic performance of the story of God's historical and ongoing work of salvation, with the people being the principal actors and the ministers of word and sacrament along with the readers and musicians being the stage prompters and with God as the audience.**

If a reader shares Old's gentle skepticism about the transformative power of religious drama and ritual in the sacraments, let that person at least review von Allmen's 1965, 21-41, *Christian worship considered as the recapitulation of the history of salvation* and Kierkegaard's picture of worship (referenced again below [¶ 91]) as a drama of salvation performed by the worshipers, with ministers and musicians as stage prompters, in the sight of God as the audience (referenced by Don M. Wardlaw in a seminar). Some implications for preachers of Kierkegaard's picture of worship as a drama of redemption by the congregation with God as the audience can be seen in Craddock, a devotee of "Mr. S. K." (Søren, Kierkegaard) regarding effective communication of the Christian faith, 2010, 26, 44. Or, as Ritschl 1963, 79, 88, so succinctly puts it, when Christians gather for worship there is no auditorium—all are on the stage, thus clarifying the

image of drama while intending to dismiss it. Lowry 1985, 33, asserts very simply that “Liturgy is a reenactment of the story of salvation, and we are there.” If life can be characterized as God’s human children cavorting and playing in the dazzling theatre of God’s glory, Calvin, *Institutes*, I. V. 8, as cited by Rigby 2011, 10, then surely Kierkegaard’s image of worship as God’s children acting out the drama of salvation before the God of salvation is agreeable. Lischer 2001, 90-91, in his view of the church’s preaching as all the ways that the church talks to itself and acts in the ongoing process of its formation as a community of faith, sees the congregation as performing the Word of God in its worship and other public works and in the callings of its members in the world, and he depicts the sermon by the minister as a kind of dress rehearsal for this performance by the community. He bases this view of the church’s life and witness partly on the book of Acts where he sees a more comprehensive theology of the Word that associates preaching with a Spirit-charged complex of words, communities and actions. And he sees the communal performance of the Word of God through reading, singing, preaching, enacting, and otherwise performing the biblical words, as being characteristic of traditions as varied as Orthodox mysticism, Roman Catholic sacramentalism, Puritan typological exegesis, and Pentecostal and African American ecstasy. And he asserts “Without the community’s performance of and participation in the Word, the chasm between the Book and the contemporary community is unbridgeable. There is no ‘meaning’ that lies dormant in the text. Meaning is disclosed in the community’s performance of the text in worship and in its witness in the world.” Long 2005, 50-51, citing Fenn 1982, 27, presents another image of worship as a drama, the acting out of a mock trial anticipating the final judgment of the day of the Lord. The testimonies or witnesses of the preacher and congregation stem from their presence with Christ and are subordinate to Christ’s testimony.

[¶90] **The development of corporate worship in Jewish and Christian history from the Temple sacrificial tradition to the word-based synagogue and church traditions has tended inevitably away from human actions intended to appease or satisfy God and towards a human recital or drama of what God has done, is doing, and promises to do for the healing and hope of a sin-sick world.**

Bonhoeffer 1975, 131-134, while not friendly towards the idea of worship as drama, insists in lecture number 3 "The Witnesses" that the pastor's witness in preaching is derivative, in a line of succession from the witness of God, the witness of the Holy Spirit, the witness of Christ, the witness of apostles, and the witness of the Scriptures, and must not be merely a spontaneous or self-expressive witness to the preacher's personal faith experience—the preacher as witness to Christ must submit to the discipline of the Scriptures. That indicates to me that, for Bonhoeffer, the script of the divine playwright is very important. Bonhoeffer, 133, sees the temptation to use the text as a springboard for our own thoughts as a constant struggle with demons. Therefore, the preacher must be constantly reliant on the help of the Christ who went to hell and back to defeat the prince of demons. *Christus Victor!* (also cited in Chapter V, [¶ 5]). Langer 1993, Chapter VI "Life Symbols: The Roots of Sacrament" especially 152-154, 159, provides a philosophical perspective on the connections of attitude, such as cultural worldview or a faith commitment, ritual, drama, and sacrament. Langer, 255, also cites Kathi Meyer, *Bedeutung und Wesen der Musik*, 1932, in which she notes the abandonment of actual sacrifices in Christian worship as had been commonly practiced in ancient religions, including that of Israel, in favor of remembering or dramatizing a sacrifice once made, a change which led to the spiritualization of worship through the elaboration and refinement of the prayers, words, and music of the liturgy, no longer just an accompaniment to the actual sacrifices, the dancing and gesticulations of the cult, but the actual vehicles of the communal celebration and devotion. A similar transition and

spiritualization of sacrifice in Jewish worship was made complete by the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 70 C.E. And E. P. Sanders 2005, 376-377, reports that well before the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish sect of the Essenes, especially the community at Qumran, having cut themselves off from the Temple worship at Jerusalem, which they saw as dominated by a corrupt priesthood, understood their community of true and faithful adherents to be a spiritual temple, and substituted the spiritual sacrifice of prayer and obedience for the sacrifice of flesh. Vermes 2004, 43-45, also reports that there were likely gatherings at Qumran including the desert community of Essenes there and adherents of Essene communities in the towns across Israel for an annual feast of covenant renewal, surely a vestige of annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Temple sacrifices. And it seems to me that the expedient of the Essenes at Qumran, reported by Vermes 2004, 82, of declaring that the Council of the Community would be the 'Most Holy Dwelling of Aaron,' i.e., take the place of the physical Temple and its Aaronic priests, and that the spiritual sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving would take the place of the burnt offering of flesh until rededication (after cleansing of corruption) of the Temple—pointing toward or a precursor of Jewish worship around Torah reading and interpretation and prayer after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the subsequent complete dispersion of the Jews, and toward the spiritual interpretation of the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist and of Christian worship generally.

[¶91] **The best of native gifts and professional expertise and sensitivity in the arts, including especially music and liturgics, can serve to enhance the worship experience and participation of all the people in Christian assembly. But these gifts have all too often been used to turn the Lord's Day service into a professional artistic performance with the people assembled mainly as a consuming public, i.e., "the audience."**

From the early church spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, to the medieval popular piety to

modern liturgical subtleties there is a range of perspectives from the purely symbolic and subjective in the worshipers' sacrifice of thanksgiving to the completely objective in the worshipers' provision of ordinary bread to the mysterious in the priest's sacrifice of the body of Christ in the transubstantiated bread. Somewhere in that broad spectrum of teachings there is surely a fair dimension of 'the sacrificial' that helps to make the sacrifice of Christ real to the worshiper who participates in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Maxwell 1949, 63, discusses the classical philosophy (substance and accident, essence and existence) and the liturgical theology (sacrifice of Christ) context of the development of the doctrine of transubstantiation as a miracle wrought by God, not magic worked by a human word. As to dramatic views of worship, whether one sees the worship service as a re-enactment (and actualization, i.e., making real and present) of the sacrifice of Christ (Catholic paradigm [West]) or a recital of (and re-engagement in, i.e., making real and present as in recapitulation = restoring Christ as the head of our lives) the history of salvation (Protestant paradigm [West]), the corporate or communal nature of the Lord's Supper can be lost if the drama and action are seen as being done by clergy, choir and other worship leaders with the congregation functioning mainly as audience and spectators of the dramatic action. As mentioned above [¶ 89], Kierkegaard was cited by Don M. Wardlaw in a seminar as suggesting the congregation as the actors, clergy and musicians and other worship leaders as stage prompters, with God serving as the audience. That's why I find it so off-putting to see Roman Catholic news releases designating a priest as the celebrant, as if the congregation of the faithful people were not celebrating the thankful meal, and Protestant worship bulletins that list the preacher, readers, musicians, and ushers as participants, as if the congregation were not participating. And that is also why I do not find the performance of the people's worship responses in oratorio or operatic style compositions by professional musicians

to be edifying in the least degree, especially when such performances are done as a musical offering in a Sunday morning worship service. Is it a required rite of passage for composers to “do” a so-called “Mass,” i.e., musical settings of the people’s responses that can be performed only by virtuosic professionals? As transportingly beautiful as the Latin words and classical music may be in themselves, I cannot keep from resenting that the part of the Mass created to be said or chanted or sung by the people has been stolen and elevated completely out of their reach. It is almost as annoying as having the peoples’ hymn, the Star-spangled Banner, the U.S. national anthem, murdered by a soul, rock, pop, or operatic soloist at a public sporting event. Why not, for the sake of decency, let the players and spectators sing their song while the virtuosic soloists listen to hear what it is supposed to sound like? The Star-spangled Banner does not have the best words or the best tune for a national hymn, but as long as it is ours, let us, *the people*, try to sing it as best we can. Beginning immediately after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States and continuing for the next decade and longer, every concert performance of the Bartlesville, Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maestro Lauren Green began with a drum roll and the audience rising to sing the Star Spangled Banner accompanied and led by the orchestra. That’s the people’s national hymn sung the only way it should ever be sung. And what a powerful experience it was! Phifer 1965, 48-49, discusses the loss of a sense of the corporate nature of the Eucharist when it is seen as a reenactment of the sacrifice of Christ performed by the priests and deacons with the congregation functioning as audience rather than as actors.

[¶92] **There is a wide variety in Christian history in the theological assessment, use and neglect of the Christian writings known as the deuterocanonical scriptures or the apocryphal writings.**

Some churches, lectionaries, preachers and worship planners may schedule lections from the deuterocanonical scriptures, aka “The Apocrypha,” which Childs 1992, 711, refers to as “part of the larger Christian canon,” included in the Septuagint but not in the Hebrew canon, and included in Roman Catholic and some but not most Protestant and ecumenical Bible translations. The confessional standards produced by various Protestant churches around the world since the Reformation have walked a delicate and awkward line with regard to the use of the deuterocanonical writings of the Apocrypha with statements similar to this one in the Belgic Confession, which can be seen with an introduction containing its historical origin and development in *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1984, 441-472. Article 6, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CANONICAL AND AOPOCRYPHAL BOOKS reads: “The church may read and take instruction from these so far as they agree with the canonical books. They are, however, far from having such power and authority that we may confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less may they be used to detract from the authority of the holy books.” Such estimates of the Apocrypha, of course, ignore the fact that some of the canonical scriptures are perhaps even more problematic with respect to the gospel than the deuterocanonical writings, and such estimates have in fact contributed to a general neglect of the treasures of wisdom that are available in the Apocrypha and a lack of a more general awareness of the struggles of Israel during the historical gap between the Old and New Testament writings. Some of the deuterocanonical texts will surely continue to be read and expounded in churches that have historically done so, and others may find this useful and edifying also.

[¶93,94,95] **The use of non-canonical writings, whether from contemporary public media or from historic Christianity or ecclesiastical texts, in**

Sunday worship services for purposes of illuminating a canonical text is a well-established and useful practice. But using such material as a principal text for exposition in Christian worship is most likely to be confusing and destructive with respect to the sense of identity of Christian communities and with respect to the authority attributed to preaching in the present-day church and world.

Bonhoeffer 1975, 160, cautioned his homiletics students in the 1930's: "Sermons from the Apocrypha should be the exception." And I would caution against the inclusion of *extra* canonical scriptures such as the texts of the library of papyrus documents found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, or the lives of the martyrs and saints, or the writings of philosophers, poets or theologians as sources for principal readings at the chief Sunday service. Butcher 2002 pairs readings from the Nag Hammadi library, including some from the Gnostic gospels, with canonical readings in one liturgical year. I discussed further perspectives on the Gnostic gospels in Chapter I. But Deiss 1976, 261, is insistent that "no merely human words, be they a text from the tradition, a document of the magisterium, or something current from the newspapers or magazines, can rival the word of God. Those other texts can certainly be very useful for illustrating the word and showing how it fits into the present life of men; sometimes they are even indispensable. But in no event can they replace God's word." James Sanders 1984, 14, illustrates the role that believing communities have played in the development of authoritative/sacred scriptural canons by noting that outer canons have developed in various faith communal traditions such that certain documents—creeds, certain hymns outside the psalter—have emerged as secondary or tertiary canons. But he does not suggest that selections from such matter might be used as primary texts for reading and preaching in worship. Historically, non-canonical scriptures have not been read in Christian worship with the exception of the acts of the martyrs as an encouragement in times of persecution, as reported by Deiss 1976, 254, citing Jungman 1951. I think Ricoeur 1995, 70, is on

target when he suggests that a Christian community loses its identity if it uses other than canonical Scripture as the text to be expounded in Sunday worship, whether the Bible is considered our sacred text or only our authoritative text. Johnson 1999, 609-610, develops the significance of a fixed canon and its exclusive use in public worship for the church's identity and historical continuity in the following way:

The canon is more than the residue of a historical process. It requires a commitment of faith by the church in every age and place. The acceptance of these specific writings by a community, not in council but in liturgical use, is the most fundamental issue for identity that the community will confront. The selection excludes any contemporary writings that may attempt to win the complete allegiance garnered by the NT canon, and it asserts the church's continuity with the historical manifestations of the church in the past. By this selection, the church assumes as well the responsibility for transmitting the same measure—in its entirety—to the church in the ages to come.

As to the mediation of the church's identity through the ages, Johnson wrote, 610, "Because the church today reads the very same writings as were read by Polycarp, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Bonhoeffer, it remains identifiably the same community." And Johnson, 611-612, insists that in order for the public reading of canonical texts to effectually contribute to the maintenance of the church's identity, the selected texts must be interpreted in their proper relation to the whole canon with a hermeneutic that is properly ecclesial in relation to the church's historical experience and in relation to the contemporary experience of the entire community and in an open context with opportunity for discussion and debate. Making a non-canonical text the focus of the service of the spoken word would neutralize the observation of Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 16, that "to take a text gives a tone of sacredness to the discourse" — whether one thinks of the canonical text as sacred or authoritative or normative, or none of the above. I have a reference above in this Chapter [¶ 25, ¶ 35] to Barr 1983, 68-70, on the basis of Jesus' teaching as one with authority and not as the scribes being that he did not always "take a text," and I have a discussion above [¶ 35] and below in Chapter V about authority in preaching

today being based on both the personal faith and witness of the preacher and his or her reference to the word of scripture. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 50, also indicate that while a sermon must have a “subject,” “taking a text” is optional. Barth 1991, 88, holds that scriptural exposition in preaching is not an option but a command and, 45, that the preaching office carries prophetic authority like that of the apostles but on a different level; and, 89, he asserts concerning the preacher’s spirituality that preaching can only take place, that is, be the Word of God, when the preacher prepares and preaches in an attitude of prayer and complete dependence upon God and God’s intention to speak through the preacher, to make the preacher’s words God’s Word. There is further discussion of the distinction between sacred and authoritative scripture in Ricoeur 1995, 68-70, and in Chapter I above. And Buttrick 1987, 248-9, while he finds the words canon and authority problematic, is careful to explain that the Scriptures are normative for Christian community because they transmit the church’s original remembering of Jesus Christ, which I take as an essential element in the *anamnesis*, making the Christ of the church’s memory real and present in the service of word and sacrament, proclamation and Lord’s Supper. Johnson 1999, 125-153, in a chapter, “Jesus in the Memory of the Church,” a title which he, 150, acknowledges excerpting from the title of a book by N. A. Dahl which contains an important discussion of *anamnesis*, provides a discussion that can help the reader to a fuller understanding of what it means to see the New Testament writings as the record of the church’s original remembering of Jesus Christ. And, 125, he states that the Greek term *anamnesis* as used, for example, in Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-26, referring to eucharistic remembrance and proclamation, does not mean simply a recalling of information from the past but “a recollection of the past that enlivens and empowers the present.” Farley 1996, 168-175, discusses the necessary function of canonical scripture in preaching the contemporary world of the gospel. Of course, *any* non-

canonical text can be profitably studied in other settings and also *referred to* in Sunday sermons.

Lowry 1992 discusses these and other tensions created by lectionary preaching, and has suggestions of ways of dealing with such obstacles.

[¶96] **The preacher’s charge of maintaining the necessary discipline, focus, intention, attention, and motivation required for adequate sermon development is undoubtedly a heavy one, and the potential barriers, distractions and dilutions are many and strong. But there are no respectable excuses or reasons for failing to meet that challenge. Preachers must give sermon work the priority, commitment, and investment that it requires.**

This Chapter and Chapter IV surely present some daunting challenges for the proverbial “busy pastor” of parish or congregation. He or she must keep coming back to the advice of the monk—was it Augustine or Luther?—“take care of your cell and your cell will take care of you,” or the decree paraphrased from Sangster 1954, 12: the preacher should be actively involved with his or her family, parish/congregation, community, and world every weekday, but not before noon. Did Sangster practice such a morning study and writing discipline on some other planet from ours or perhaps in a monastic cloister? No. He did it as a busy Methodist pastor in post-World War II England. And not only that, Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 334, report that during the war, Sangster converted the basement of his London church into a residential air raid shelter for a number of neighborhood people whose homes were destroyed, and lived with his wife in one small room of that basement from 1940 to 1945 while continuing with his preaching responsibilities and extending pastoral ministry to his shelter “guests” and to the larger community. So, let’s not complain about distractions or the “busy pastor syndrome.” Let’s look to Sangster as a role model for the discipline of consistent sermon preparation work in the midst of whatever level of daily chaos may be our lot. If contemporary family, church, and community lifestyles prevent one from

having such a firm block of study and preparation time another way must be found. Discussions of busy pastors and the priority of sermon preparation time can be seen in Blackwood 1946, 157-168; Davis 1958, 12-13; Massey 1974, 71-72; and Buttrick 1987, 305-306. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 146, report at some length on the importance that Gerald Kennedy (1907-1980) placed upon preaching and sermon preparation among the myriad responsibilities of pastors, as follows: “In spite of the many pressures upon the preacher to neglect his preaching in the pursuit of his other duties, Kennedy places prime importance upon the ministry of proclamation. His statement of the place of the preaching ministry is one of the strongest ever affirmed in the history of the Christian faith:

In a day of movements and causes, it is one of the temptations of the ministry to become so embroiled in them that the preaching of the gospel becomes secondary. I am convinced by experience and observation that the ceaseless pressure to serve on all of these programs is the devil’s attempt to melt the preacher down for the tallow trade.... The most critical and potentially the most influential event of the week is the sermon.

It is hardly an exaggeration...that the fate of Protestant Christianity is bound up with the rise and fall of effective preaching.

The minister ought to be a good administrator, an efficient organizer, an attractive leader of youth, a first-rate advertiser, an adequate psychologist, a faithful pastor, and an effective preacher—all of these things; but the greatest of them all is to preach “as though ‘God were intreating by us.’”

Massey 1974, 39-42, in his chapter on “A Responsible Self: Confronting Life,” has a section on ‘Responsibility and Relations’ in which he provides a helpful overview of some of the perspectives and practices that can help preachers to maintain a constructive balance and rhythm among the many responsibilities and relations in work and life. Fant and Pinson 1995, VI, 248-249, cite Alexander Whyte (1836-1921) in an address to preachers when he was moderator of the Free Church Assembly in Scotland: “We cannot look seriously in one another’s faces and say it is want of time. It is want of intention. It is want of determination. It is want of method. It is want of motive. It is want of conscience. It is want of heart. It is want of anything and everything but

time.” Barbara Brown Taylor 2001, 163, states that when preachers complain that they don’t have time to prepare the kind of sermons they want to preach she wonders: “If we don’t have time to preach the gospel, then what *do* we have time for?” That brings to mind the words of Jesus: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing” (Luke 10:41-42 NRSV). Taylor also wrote “I know I know, life is short, and ordained ministry will always require all the time there is... We have as much time as anybody does. We have all the time there is. All that remains to be seen is what we will do with it.”

[¶97] **Some of the preeminent theologians and preachers of the 20th century have acknowledged the heaviness and all-consuming complexity of pastoral work in general and of the preaching responsibility in particular, and have offered for consideration the wisdom from their own experience and their own perspectives and approaches to the challenge and the work.**

The complexity of the pastoral calling is articulated well by Reinhold Niebuhr in *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* published in 1929 after he served as pastor of the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit, 1915-1928, as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 346: “Here is a task which requires the knowledge of a social scientist and the insight and imagination of a poet, the executive talents of a business man and the mental discipline of a philosopher.” Fant 1975, 17, reports that when Dietrich Bonhoeffer served as pastor of a German congregation in London, he became acutely aware of the pressures of the pastoral responsibility upon the preaching minister. “It is really incomprehensible that so much should happen in so small a congregation,” wrote Bonhoeffer in a 1934 letter home. And Fant notes that “Later, in his homiletical lectures to the students at Finkenwalde, he made reference to these pressures and the necessity for the minister to continue to devote sufficient time to his sermon preparation in spite of them.” Ritschl 1963, 181-183, mentions the problem of balance among four important factors in the minister’s life: his

theological study, his congregation, his health, and his family; but he only exacerbates it with his classical standards of historical study in original sources and languages! Yet, his suggestions of choosing a theological study focus per month (how about per quarter or per year or half year?) and avoiding the time-waster of consulting tertiary resources—the so-called “sermon helps”—should be considered. Stott 1982, 180-181, has some useful citations of Calvin, Spurgeon, Brooks, Graham, and Barnhouse on the preacher's study. The best wisdom for taming the anxious sense of time competition among the varied duties of a pastor may be found in *Integrative Preaching* by Willimon, where he acknowledges that commitment to disciplined study and preparation time is essential but also articulates how sermon preparation must proceed during, and make use of, the full round of the pastor's work and other life involvements. Similarly, Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 148, report Gerald Kennedy's view that preparation is a constant task for the preacher:

There is a sense in which he is always in the process of preparing his sermons. Our nets must be out always for only then can we be sure of catching the ideas and the insights which can so easily pass us by. Christopher Morley spoke of the mind's line of tension spread out like the web of a spider. You can never tell what will fall into it, or when it will happen, but like the spider you can be sure that it will catch something if it is spread widely.

[¶98] **Preachers may trust the *preconscious* or *subconscious* mind to continue working on sermon development while they are engaged in other responsibilities and other life involvements. But the preacher must also take steps to avoid the professional burnout that can come from uninterrupted *conscious* rumination on work responsibilities.**

A possible hazard of this 24-7 (24 hours a day-7 days per week) view of sermon preparation is indicated by a suggestion of psychologist Guy Winch heard in a TED (Technology, Engineering, Design) Talk program on NPR (National Public Radio) in 2021, that a major cause of professional burnout is the destructive habit of constantly ruminating on one's work during off

work hours which prevents one from being fully present with family, friends, and community engagements. Winch has published a book with suggestions of how to break the cycle of constant work-related rumination. But integrative sermon preparation is not about conscious rumination. It is about trusting the involuntary, preconscious or subconscious work that the creative mind does willy nilly to produce the conscious connections that come to mind while the preacher is at home, out and about, or back in the sermon workshop. Lowry 1997, 98-100, discusses how the preconscious mind works on the sermon during other rounds in between the sermon workshop sessions and how it probably works best if a workshop session ends at a point of a felt difficulty in the preparation's progress rather than at a "good stopping place" such as a point of completion or transition. Thus, having to break off the sermon workshop session before getting to a good stopping place might be a help rather than a hindrance to forward progress on sermon development. Massey 1974, 71-72, describes how the memory and the subconscious mind tend to sort things out and bring forth new facets when the creative process is given time to work unhurriedly. And he notes: "The subconscious does queer things; it also does the right thing provided it is given proper time and is prayerfully guided (also cited in Chapter V [¶ 17]). Craddock's 2010, 40-41, preliminary remarks on sermon preparation time point in the same direction. He has an extended discussion of the preacher's "life of study" on pp. 69-83. And in 2011, 7-8, some of Craddock's fourteen aphorisms given in preaching seminars point in the same direction as Willimon's wisdom in *Integrative Preaching*. And Craddock 2011, 169-177, has further words of wisdom on "the habit of the sermon" and the freedom that comes with the repetition and satisfaction that form the habit. Willimon's perspective does not eliminate the necessary discipline of committing serious time to general and theological study and specific sermon preparation. But he makes a strong case that when the minister devotes appropriate time

and commitment to the full round of pastoral responsibilities, each function can become a contributor to effective sermon preparation and delivery rather than only a competitor for sermon preparation time. That perspective brings a sense of hope and healthy balance to the daily struggle with time competition. An example that validated for me Willimon's observation that an integrative preaching perspective alleviates much of the supposed time competition in the minister's work day was my discovery that when I designated the Thursday morning's one hour block of time assigned to work on the sermon of Sunday after next (my preparation pattern is described in Chapter V) to developing corporate liturgical prayers keyed to the principal lection of the day (Sunday after next), the exercise of reviewing the text and my study notes in order to compose those prayers almost always advanced rather than retarded or halted my progress toward getting a sermon shape in mind. When I write prayers that help the congregation pray in response to the text, I get closer to being able to preach good news in response to the text.

[¶99] **When it comes to the creative challenge and productivity (meaning efficiency) of the 5-day work week of sermon preparation (Sunday is a sixth workday for preachers), there is one question that is far more important than the questions of how fast one can read and comprehend or how much one has read, studied, experienced, produced, or remembered cumulatively throughout one's life, and that is the question did one do this day the requisite early morning hour of reading in a theological or related field of study in a work or passage that was *not* intentionally chosen to correlate with sermon texts and themes currently in development.**

A regular routine of devoting an early morning hour of each sermon preparation workday to theological reading is a reliable way to get the preacher's theological thinking muscle warmed up and working in the way that is most productive for the creative sorting and sifting that is necessary for true and honest sermon development. By true and honest I mean, at a minimum,

sermon preparation that involves the preacher in finding his or her own connections between the scriptural word and the present preaching situation and finding his or her own words for proclaiming the good news in those connections. This definition of true and honest rules out sermon development that ends with a cobbling together of paraphrases and quotations from the preacher's study resources, and it most certainly rules out the adaptation of the sermons of others. And, of course, the daily wake-up exercise of the theological thinking muscle is not just important as a warm-up for that day's labor in the sermon preparation workshop; it is also building up and maintaining that muscle's strength and flexibility for the long term. Any accumulation of theological knowledge to be mentally banked for possible withdrawal and use is, of course, a welcome bonus of the daily workout in theological reading. It is noteworthy that, as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 145, the famous 20th century preacher and Methodist bishop, Gerald Kennedy (1907-1980) arose at 5:30 each morning to spend two hours reading theology before starting his office work and specific sermon preparation.

CHAPTER IV

Proclamation – Homiletic Theology II:

Expository Preaching in Christian Worship: Reclaiming Its Importance, Getting Better at It

The most familiar and commonly understood definitions of the term expository preaching go along the lines of the one given by Old 1998a (vol. 1), 9, “The expository sermon is the systematic explanation of Scripture done on a week by week...basis at the regular meeting of the congregation.” But that familiar definition narrows the meaning of exposition to explanation or explication and leaves open the question of what interpretive approaches may be used in explicating *and setting forth the meaning and intention of* the scripture passage.

[¶2] **Christian preachers and teachers from the earliest times until now have tended to look for a theme in any passage of scripture and to develop a lesson or a sermon around the identified subject.**

Dargan 1904, 49-51, reports that the early church theological father, Origen of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 185-254), is credited with a consistent focus on scripture exposition in his preaching, but that at the same time he is generally criticized for his sometimes extreme and fantastical use of allegory as a method of scripture interpretation. Borg 2001, 42, on the other hand, notes that allegorical interpretation “was widespread in Christianity from the second century through the Middle Ages” and that “During these centuries, Christian theologians often spoke of four levels of interpretation of biblical texts: the literal, the allegorical, the analogical, and the tropological” (Tropological refers to biblical interpretation involving moral metaphor). Borg goes on to note that Origen distinguished between “spiritual” and “bodily” meanings in scripture texts and

insisted that the Bible as a whole should be read spiritually and that some passages must *not* be read bodily. And Borg wrote: “By ‘spiritual meanings’ he meant approximately what I mean by metaphorical. By ‘bodily meanings,’ he (Origen) meant literal-factual meanings.” I reference Borg’s historical-metaphorical-sacramental approach later in this Chapter [¶ 20] and passim. The example of the development, decline, and recovery of allegorical/spiritual/metaphorical interpretation of scripture in Christian history raises the questions addressed in this Chapter: What is expository preaching, why is it important, and how can one keep on getting better at doing it? The term expository preaching has been used recently in a range of ways or levels. At a minimum it can mean what a good many of us preachers tend to do with the lectionary readings. We study the text using commentaries and perhaps some facility with original languages in light of our knowledge of the liturgical setting and what’s going on in God’s church and world until we come up with a topic or issue that seems relevant and that gives us some rhetorical “handles” for using the text as a springboard for what is essentially a topical, thematic, or subject based sermon, according to Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 4-5, among others. Buttrick 1987, 266-7, refers to this as seeking a modern parallel to the scripture text in some perennial human experience and, in 1994, 80, calls this a method of “distillation.” Buttrick writes that the problem with this selection or distillation of a single thematic, subject, or topical parallel to the scripture passage is that it can turn us away from a study of the text as a symbol of revelation. Similarly, Barth 1991 warns many times against assigning a theme or scopus to a text since that can get in the way of discovering the actual witness of the text. Wilson 2007, 11-14, indicates that prior to the advent of historical criticism the task of interpreting a biblical text in a lesson or sermon was a linear process of identifying the teaching or theme of the text and then preaching or teaching that doctrine from the Bible as a whole. And he credits the higher criticism with revealing the

necessity of the hermeneutic circle, or spiral, an ongoing dialogue between the text in its historical background and the interpreter's contemporary language and time. So, it seems that the linear or short-circuited distillation process is a throwback to a practice that was conventional prior to the introduction of historical criticism.

[¶3] **While the historical and narrative character of the Bible may not always allow for identifying a theme, intention, or conceptual focus in the text at hand, the content of that text in its larger textual setting and original life situation can be used to identify a theme or intention for a lesson or sermon to be developed from that text and supported from the Bible as a whole and from historic Christian teaching.**

Wilson 2007, 39-53, argues that, with all due respect for the hazards of assuming that a text has a theme which can direct a preacher into a widely sourced thematic, topical, or propositional sermon, his approach of following historical and literary exegesis with theological exegesis and a gospel hermeneutic, along with consideration of the situation and character of the gathered community that is to participate in the preaching event, can guide the preacher in developing a *theme sentence* for the text and the sermon that will clarify what the text and sermon should do with and mean to the preacher and the congregation in the present situation and occasion. That is, not a theme identified as *the* theme of the text but a theme *chosen* for the present preaching situation from among possible themes that arise from the historical, literary, theological, and gospel exegesis of the text. Thus, Wilson, 133, reiterates that whatever form a sermon takes, whether traditional points and illustrations or a newer narrative plotting or image development, “common to any sermon is development of a theme that answers the question, what was the sermon about?” And Wilson, 133-134, emphasizes that, from the perspective of effective communication in preaching, the identification of a theme or major concern in the text to become the theme or major concern of the sermon can help the preacher to develop and preach a sermon

that has “a single focus, not two or ten.” Similarly, Mitchell 1990, 117-118, asserts that Massey’s expositional form that he references “is not to be confused with the verse-by-verse ‘expository’ treatment, which gives a wide variety of sermon ideas and deals in depth with none of them.” But rather, “Good expositional preaching in any culture will be focused or centered on one main idea and purpose in the passage” (also referenced below [¶ 5]). Lowry 1997, 15-17, expands on the hermeneutical and theological problems with the distillation process that Buttrick and others have identified—extraction of universal truths or themes from the scriptural context of the biblical narrative, with citations from Hans Frei in “his groundbreaking volume *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*” in which the distillation process is referenced as “the separation of biblical content from biblical form.” On the other hand, Massey 1980, 52-54, suggests that a preacher begin sermon preparation on a chosen or assigned text in this way: “1. *Study your given text or passage at firsthand until its setting, form, and insight are clear to you.*” He notes that the “insight” or message of the text must be understood before it (the text) can be abstracted for use in a sermon. And he adds that “A text is ‘abstracted’ when a truth or theme is drawn from it,” and he references James Mark Baldwin 1901 on his use of the concept of abstraction. I note in “Book II, Chapter II in my discussion of *The Open Bible Lectionary*’s schedule for Advent 4 and Christmas 1 and 2 of Year 6 for developing a series of three sermons on one verse, Mark 1:1, that some academicians and other preachers with a well-known theological, or social agenda frequently reverse the distillation process by finding a text to use as a keynote for the message they want to preach, and I mentioned sermon collections of Paul Tillich as examples and referenced a comment by Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 142, on how some of Walter Rauschenbusch’s (1861-1918) sermons were social gospel essays with associated texts appended. Keller 2015, 10, 42-44, uses the term distillation in a positive vein when discussing

the process of developing a sermon from a scripture text, but he strongly disavows the notion that a text has one main point or a big idea that should be the focus of a sermon on that text. It should be acknowledged that the process of distilling a theme or a big idea out of a text can produce edifying sermons and can be used whether we are following a liturgical year lectionary, i.e., *lectio selecta de tempore*, or preaching continuously through a book of the Bible, i.e., *lectio continua de scriptura*.

[¶4] **The history of Christian teaching and preaching is a story of occasional swings back and forth between styles and designs in the continuing effort to balance the details of literary and historical exegesis with the exposure of themes and concerns that may effectively make a connection between the text and the lives of people in the church and world of the present preaching or teaching occasion.**

Developing a thematic sermon from a text is a procedure with a long and distinguished history, beginning with a shift from the early church homily, an informal commentary on a scripture text, to a more formal and structured sermon following Greek and Roman rhetorical tradition beginning in the third century and blossoming more fully in the fourth century due to the new freedom and secular acceptance of Christianity after the “conversion” and edicts of the emperor Constantine, according to Dargan 1904, 65. Dargan also notes, 188, that the more analytic approach to shaping sermons compared to the simple expository and hortatory homily was further developed in the 12th and 13th centuries, due partly to the influence of scholasticism. He mentions Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century, and Antony of Padua, 13th century, as examples. There was a reversion to the exegetical homily by some of the 16th century Protestant Reformers, for which see Dargan 1904, 380 f. But the thematic or topical sermon was reintroduced or revived at least as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it was a welcome and much needed correction to the pedantry of straight exegetical preaching, according to Dargan

1912, 275-280. Charles Rice 1983, 104, cites Helmut Thielicke as coining the term textual/thematic for effective sermons that issue from the preacher's movement ("ferrying") back and forth between the world of the biblical text and the world in which he or she preaches. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 229, report Thielicke's defense of his approach:

Therefore the sermon, which should be an intellectual organism, must have a central point; each individual sermon must have an organizing center that grows out of the text. . . I choose this latter textual-thematic kind of preaching, and for three different reasons.

First, in this way one remains within the text and allows it to be an end in itself. One discovers in it a center and a periphery and one illuminates it on the basis of its main ideas. Second, this way of determining the theme not only helps to keep the sermon true to the text but also helps the preacher to achieve order and clarity. If he merely proceeds word by word in the style of a homily, making his comments as he goes along, the unifying bond may easily slip away from him. ...

Third, this method is also more helpful to the hearer. He retains it better and can more readily pass it on to others.

Borg 2001, 42, citing David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination*, notes that since the Bible is a "religious classic," a piece of literature that has endured through time and continues to be read and reread in new settings, and, because it is a classic, has a surplus of meaning, and, thus, its meaning is not confined to the intention of its author in its original setting, therefore the careful use of a metaphorical approach to interpretation of scriptural texts in new settings is justified. Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 20, describe Luther's approach as one of announcing the heart or main message of a whole passage and then providing verse by verse commentary in terms of that theme. Others have taken the reverse course of beginning the sermon with word by word textual notes and explications and then proceeding to thematic explorations, a two-part sermon pattern that I discuss further in the next paragraph under a definition of the homily given by Edwards 2004, 61. West 1997, 26, notes that one accomplishment of the three-year lectionaries among Protestant churches that had not previously followed a lectionary was to reverse the direction of sermon planning from text following topic (the preacher selects a text or texts to support the topic

she or he has decided to discuss) to topic following text (the preacher distils a topic out of a scheduled reading). Barth 1991 consistently rejects both approaches—deriving a subject or theme from a text and selecting a text to support a chosen topic or situation—preferring that the lines of a sermon simply follow the lines of the appointed or chosen text, which, 78, he thinks better reflects appropriate “modesty under the text,” closer to the verse by verse exposition which I discuss in the following paragraphs.

[¶5] **The work of finding connections between scheduled preaching texts and the present situation and needs of the people in God’s church and world requires much study and thinking by preachers; and a wide range of possible sermon forms and themes is available to preachers who do their own thinking and their own study of text and preaching situation.**

Fant and Pinson 1995, VI, 10, report that Charles Haddon Spurgeon defends the practice of “spiritualizing” when it comes to getting a sermon out of a hard or “unusual” text, which I cite also in Book II, n. 17 [¶2]. Davis 1958, 83, lists possible preaching subjects derived from Matthew 7:15-23. His book is a good guide to doing a high-quality job of deriving a preaching subject from a text, including, in Chapters 7-9, his approach to the matter of sermon structuring or sermon forms. Davis comes at the matter of sermon structuring from a distinctive angle, first discussing forms based on intended function: whether the sermon is intended to function mainly as proclamation, teaching, or therapy; and then discussing forms that stem organically out of the generative idea that the preacher has identified for the sermon. And Blackwood 1942, 91-92, proposes developing a series on Luke’s Gospel by doing careful exegesis on each paragraph to identify its message or theme and then selecting those paragraphs that shall be the texts for the series of sermons. This, it seems to me, can only be semi-continuous and semi-expository. It is a process that is frequently used even by Scripture scholars, homiletic theologians, and liturgical

theologians in producing the plethora of “lectionary aids” for preachers published since the introduction of the 3-year lectionaries, including notably the pioneering periodical work of Fuller 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, and combined in book form, *Preaching the New Lectionary*, in 1974, and revised and updated with Daniel Westberg in the 2006 Third Edition, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. The extent to which this kind of sermon crafting leads to Scripture exposition probably varies with each preacher from week to week. It is expository preaching at a minimal level. At worst the text is left behind after it is read in the worship service and the preacher takes off on flights of her own fancy. Luther’s pungent “blue ducks,” “fairy land,” “hen’s milk” descriptions of this abuse are cited in Davis 1958, 120. Borg 2001, 43-44, acknowledges that the hazard or temptation of such flights of fancy is a cautionary limitation of his metaphorical approach to scripture interpretation and he indicates that the needed controls can be provided by balancing the metaphorical approach with the historical approach and by careful discernment of the situation and needs and capacities of the community in which the interpretation is offered. Swank 1981, 62-63, has this quote from Smart 1964, 8:

When one hunts through volumes of American sermons for instances of preaching on Old Testament texts, one becomes aware that an acute situation in this area exists. . . . More than one volume of sermons that have been heralded as a brave attempt to let the Old Testament speak have proved, on close examination, to reveal very little of the Biblical author’s mind and a much larger measure of the preacher’s mind on subjects only remotely connected with the Scripture under consideration.

And Swank states the necessity of preachers carefully listening to the assigned or selected text whether developing a sermon from the scriptures or from a situation to be addressed so as to avoid committing “homiletical rape of the scriptures.” If our sermons on appointed texts are more topical or thematic than expository, we congratulate ourselves for allowing “God” to select our topic through a scheduled Scriptural passage, whether *lectio selecta de tempore* or *lectio continua de scriptura*. But the main problem with even the best of lectionary helps or pulpit aids is not that

the writers have made bad or wild connections between the text and contemporary reality; rather the main problem is that preachers must find or make their own connections out of their own wrestling with the text and present reality if they are to effectively bear witness to the gospel from their heart and mind and faith experience with integrity and as it relates to the present congregation and situation. That is, true and real preaching requires that sermons reflect the preacher's own thinking and creative work in connecting text with the people and reality of a particular place and time. Consulting the sermon aids and the commentaries organized around the lectionary schedule will more often than not divert preachers from doing their own study and their own thinking and finding or making their own connections between the text and the present preaching situation.

[¶6] **Thorough exegetical work must undergird the development of every sermon, but the technical details and findings of such work should, in most cases, not be directly displayed in the sermon. Preachers should communicate their *messages* “in their own words,” not their exegetical findings.**

The opposite extreme from preaching on a theme or topic suggested by or extracted from or brought to a text is, of course, preaching as a verse-by-verse commentary in which preachers expose everything they have discovered about each word and syllable of the text, especially the esoterica of Greek and Hebrew grammar and word studies. But if one acknowledges that every sermon, whether topical/situational/thematic/subject-based or textual/exegetical/expositional should have sound scriptural exegesis behind it and underneath it, then one must question the purpose and effectiveness of purely “exegetical” or “explicative” or “explanatory” sermons. Such preaching fails the test which is employed by Dargan 1912, 300, that is, the test of simplicity, clarity, and the use without the parade of learning. And it is highly unlikely to communicate good

news. Massey 1980, 56, lists “four basic ways that sermon exposition can go askew,” including: “assuming that attention to the textual passage is enough by itself to produce an adequate sermon.” And, as referenced above [¶ 3], Mitchell 1990, 117-118, notes that Massey’s expositional approach to an extended passage of Scripture is “not to be confused with the verse-by-verse ‘expository’ treatment, which gives a wide variety of sermon ideas and deals in depth with none of them.” Lischer 2001, 2, quotes a passage from Gerhard von Rad’s *Biblical Interpretation in Preaching* in which the Old Testament scholar acknowledges that the preacher and the scientific exegete have much in common as interpreters of Scripture, including that both must inwardly appropriate the intellectual content of a text and apply it existentially to their own lives, yet he also recognizes that interpretation in preaching is in a different form of speech and in a different confrontation from interpretation in scientific exegesis. That difference in setting and form of speech opens up a wide range of possibilities for the form of preaching to vary from the form of exegetical commentary. Further along, Lischer, 69-70, discusses the danger of overloading the sermon with one’s research findings in an effort to completely bridge the gap between the world of the Bible and that of the preacher and the congregation, since that goal is impossible of achievement. A complex approach of grammatical analysis, sometimes veering into fanciful or spiritual allegorization following the example of Origen (185-254), was the tendency of some of the *lectio continua de scriptura* preaching in the early church and was revived in the Calvinist side of the Reformation, except the allegorization part, but not so much in the Lutheran side which was more influenced than the Calvinist side by the classical rhetoric revived by Erasmus, according to Edwards 2004, 279, and Fant and Pinson 1995, I, 36. A further development of the extremes and complexity of exegetical and “theologizing” preaching under the influence of Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen in Europe in the 1930’s is set forth and

critiqued in Ritschl 1963, 137-143. Unfortunately, as interesting and important as such dissection of a text may be, whether grammatical analysis or using modern historical kinds of criticism or merely parroting and paraphrasing contemporary scripture scholars and other theologians, and while it may be a necessary part of sermon preparation work, and while a straight forward presentation of the findings of such work may be called scripture exposition in a narrow sense of the term, and while such a display may be like the Servant of the Lord in being unattractive, having no form or majesty, having grown up out of dry ground (Isaiah 53:2), it is not the proclamation of the gospel and is not edifying or inspiring to most people in a worship setting. Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 181, report that Charles R. Brown (1862-1950) wrote, “The expository sermon is a product of exegesis, but not an exhibition of it. It is altogether wise to dig beforehand with your Greek spade and your Hebrew shovel but not to be digging while you are preaching.”

[¶7] Massey 1974, 53, opens a chapter on responsible hermeneutics in sermon preparation with these words: “In the work of Christian preaching true effectiveness depends largely on what stands *behind* and *within* what is said. In that chapter, attention is focused upon the hermeneutical ‘homework’ that *precedes* preaching.” And, regarding Massey’s 1980, 56, list of four ways that sermon exposition can go askew, mentioned in the previous paragraph: each of those four hazards has to do with displaying one’s exegetical methods and findings rather than using those methods and findings to develop and communicate a message of good news in relation to the lives of the hearers. Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 272, writing about the well-received expository preaching of “Puritan style physician of the soul” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, M.D., said “It is significant to notice...that Lloyd-Jones does not mean by ‘expository preaching’ that dreary, continuous parsing of Greek or Hebrew words or that aimless, meandering commentary on

successive phrases that has been passed off as ‘expository preaching’ by many lazy or inept modern preachers.” And they cite Lloyd-Jones to the effect that what turns expository work into preaching ‘is that it becomes a message and that it has a distinct form and pattern.’ Contrary to Ritschl’s indictment of Barth and Thurneysen above [¶ 6], Barth 1991, 81, 127-129, insists that the preacher must not display exegetical work in the pulpit but should display the *results* of exegetical work done in the study in statements that are both explication and application (also cited below [¶ 60]). That is, according to Barth 1991, 81-82, 111-114, the preacher who is coming before the congregation out of his or her own passage through the grace and judgment of the gospel must neither follow exegesis with application nor get stuck in exegesis, 98-99, which itself should not be limited to an historical-critical or purely empirical approach which would be a kind of paganism. Wilson 2007, 58, highlights stinging criticisms from Thomas Oden and Walter Wink of the “dry-as-a-bone” preaching produced by narrowly exegetical sermons since the advent of the higher historical criticism in the Enlightenment. And the remedy that Wilson proposes begins with the hermeneutical work of sermon preparation rather than sermon shape or arrangement, that is, the preacher in sermon preparation should follow literary and historical exegesis with theological exegesis and should infuse theological exegesis with a gospel hermeneutic in order to produce a sermon that is full of hope and promise. That kind of exegetical and hermeneutic work could help a preacher to follow Barth’s 1991, 82 (# 2), advice for communicative language in preaching: “Exegesis and meditation must become speech to others: address, my own speech.” Barth, 83, 128-129, indicates that the preacher’s language should be simple, provide honest information, earnest enough to indicate that something serious is to be communicated, but not too lofty or technical. Bonhoeffer 1975, 178-179, poses the following questions and statements for evaluating sermons as to the appropriate use of exegetical work: “did

the interpretation of the text stay on the main track—going off on tangents may be appropriate for exegetical research, but not for the sermon—?” and “Is the direction (it might even be called the attack) of the sermon obvious, i.e., what it seeks to accomplish; where has the fight with the devil been enjoined; did everything get bogged down in mere textual paraphrase?” Wiersbe 1989, 17, reports that Phillips Brooks explained the absence of precise theological definitions and detailed exegetical notes in his sermons by saying “When I am interesting, I am vague; when I am definite, I am dull.” Skudlarek 1981, 16, mentions Harry Emerson Fosdick's oft cited caricature of a preacher who approached the pulpit convinced that “folks come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites.” Massey 1980, 86, indicates that an important feature for preachers to notice when “studying the methods of Master Preachers” by reading their published sermons is “how the preacher’s personality influenced the preaching style.” And he notes that Phillips Brooks’ (1835-1893) often quoted definition of preaching as “communication of truth through personality” is actually an abbreviation of “the communication of truth by (a) man to men,” that is, by a person to people, which resonates quite well with Barth’s “Exegesis and Meditation must become speech to others: address, my own speech.” Mitchell 1990, 56-75, in his chapter on “The Black Approach to the Bible,” provides specific guidance and a good framework for developing sermons that use biblical studies in a way that is both Bible-centered and people-friendly, under the headings ‘The Bible as Oral Tradition,’ ‘Gospel, Not Science,’ ‘Creative Use of Scholarship,’ ‘Imaginative Elaboration,’ ‘Identification: The Bible as My Story,’ ‘Storytelling,’ and ‘The Universal Bible’ (that chapter is also referenced above in Chapter II [¶ 13]).

[¶8] **If a preacher thinks it necessary or helpful to provide textual**

information in a sermon to substantiate the biblical basis of the sermon's message, it can be done as the opening gambit of the sermon's progress or all along the way.

Edwards 2004, 61, defines homily as “a verse-by-verse exegesis and application of a continuous passage of Scripture.” That definition suggests the pattern of a two-part sermon in which part one is devoted to analysis of the scriptural text and the second part is devoted to exhortation and proclamation of the message and intent of the text in terms of the situation of the present congregation. Borg 2003 and/or 2001 indicates somewhere that such two-part homilies are still common in Anglican/Episcopalian and Roman Catholic services and that part two sometimes consists of an extended contemporary metaphor, that is, a story (also referenced above in Chapter III [¶ 14] and below [¶ 11]). Ronald Allen 1998, 177-179, discusses the two-part sermon form under the heading “Puritan Plain Style” and adapts it slightly for use not only when preaching from a text but also when preaching on a theological teaching or a church practice. It may be that some highly gifted preachers have developed and preached a two-part sermon consisting of textual explanations followed by application to the present situation wherein the transition point resembled the “sudden shift” in the plotted sermons discussed in Lowry 1980, 1985, 1992, and 1997. But that is highly unlikely, and the two kinds of turning points, narrative plotting of conflict and resolution versus discursive moves of explication and application, should not be confused. Lowry 1997, 78, mentions another two-part sermon approach, which comes much closer to resembling his own idea of the sermon plotted as a narrative, that of Paul Scott Wilson in *Imagination of the Heart*, wherein the first half of the sermon may display issues in the context of “law” and the second half may display a resolution of issues in the context of gospel-grace. Lowry, however, does not see the sudden shift coming at the sermon's midpoint but sometime around three-fourths to five-sixths of the way through. The two-step process of explication of the

text followed by application to present day life is embraced by Keller 2015, 22, 41-42. One of the dangers or problems that Keller acknowledges with this two-part structure is that the preacher may get absorbed in exegesis and short change the good news at the end of the sermon. Keller's embrace of the two-part sermon pattern may explain why he waffles, 165-166, on the appropriateness of encouraging the congregation to take notes on the sermon during the preaching. Sangster 1951, 59, favored sermons that begin with a text rather than a life situation but cautioned against getting bogged down or lost in exegetical notes:

Those who plead for life-situation preaching take the view that far too many sermons begin with a text, dawdle with it in Samaria or Jerusalem, and quite often never get the theme related to present-day life at all. The preacher takes a specialized interest in the flavor of a Greek verb, or gives a lengthy historical description of the precise circumstances of the Hebrew prophet he is discussing, but what it all has to do with the farm laborer in the transept or the harassed businessman in the back pew, nobody seems to know. Some worshippers even doubt if the preacher knows himself. He is just 'preaching' – filling the twenty-five minutes allotted to the purpose with talk! (also cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 336)

James I. Packer, as quoted in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 271-272, in an unpublished paper giving his reflections on the preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1991), provides a characterization of some Puritan preaching that is different from the plain style two-part sermon:

Application has been going on throughout the sermon; in one sense, it has all been application. In the direct tradition of the Puritan 'physicians of the soul,' Lloyd-Jones (M.D. and medical practice prior to preaching ministry) has been bringing everything to bear on his hearers from the start. ... Lloyd-Jones is essentially a doctrinal preacher, teaching and applying systematically biblical principles and truths. His mental make-up reminds one in many ways of John Calvin, and his doctrines are recognizably those of evangelical Calvinism, developed in the manner of the Puritans, with their emphasis on regeneration, and of the eighteenth-century revival preachers, with their stress on the joy and exaltation of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Donald G. Miller 1957, 53, cites a metaphor of the distinction between exegetical commentary and expository sermon that is somewhat obscure nowadays in the long absence of a monetary gold standard: "Good commentary is bullion; good exposition, coin." Thus, expository sermons in

the language and images of everyday transactions must be backed up *in the preacher's study* by sound exegesis in the language of critical analysis.

[¶9] **The meaning and use of the word homily has shifted in various ways and directions in the history of Christian liturgical and homiletic theology.**

Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 9-10, observe how the word homily, a familiar discourse or talk, stems from Christianity's Jewish rather than Greek origins; but they assert that the shift from the informal homily to the rhetorical sermon must be considered an advance because the rhetoric of Greek culture was a tested way of persuading people and was thus better to reach more people in the Gentile world; and they note that this is now the "science" of "homiletics," which is simply the adaptation of rhetoric to the particular demands of Christian preaching.

Davis 1958, 162, notes that the now conventional definition of homily as an ordered exposition of a passage of scripture has evolved during Christian history and is almost the reverse of the previous usage of the word: "an informal discursive talk, in which digression, passing from one subject to another, was rather the rule than the exception. The early homily used no text and developed no particular theme." Bonhoeffer 1975, 124-125, traces the development of *homilein* from confidential talk in the New Testament to an exhortation before a closed circle in the time of Justin Martyr and Clement to a public address that was open to catechumens and heathens in the time of Origen to homiletics as the science of preaching in the seventeenth century. Deiss 1976, 284, 289, uses the word homily "in the strict sense of a discourse that explains and actualizes the word of God in the liturgical celebration" and cites numerous historical sources of this usage in a footnote. Johnson 1999, 458, sees *The Letter to The Hebrews* as having the typical rhythm of a homily by alternating between exposition and exhortation stemming from the

exposition, a pattern of moving in and out of text and matters of present-day life seen also in the Black preaching tradition which Buttrick 1987, 335, mentions favorably (referenced more fully below [¶ 11]). Those definitions may intend to present a balance between explaining what the text meant in its original setting and proclaiming its message for the here and now, but in practice the here and now part often gets slighted or obscured in the technical aspects of exegesis, as is reflected in Dargan's 1912, 397, appraisal of the preaching of Gottfried Menken (1768-1831) of Bremen, Germany: "His method of preaching was that of the homily. He avoided themes and their logical analysis, making his sermons consist almost exclusively of expository comment on some passage of the Bible, preferring the historical treatment." Sloyan 1984, 13, reflects a perspective that is distinctive of the "Catholic liturgical paradigm" (West 1997) when he suggests rather off-handedly that a homily is a message closely related to the biblical reading, thereby fitting well into the worship service, whereas a sermon is a discourse not closely related to the biblical readings and thereby detaching itself from the worship service and becoming a good or bad performance on its own. Sloyan seems oblivious to the fact that a sermon that is rhetorically structured may or may not set forth the message of a scripture passage in its own historical context and in its relevance to the situation of the present congregation. On the other hand, Sloyan, in the same place, reflects a perspective more distinctive of the "Protestant liturgical paradigm" (West 1997) by indicating that it is close relation with the biblical reading rather than specific reference to the Eucharist that makes a message fitting for a worship service. Sloyan, it seems to me, goes far in demonstrating positively that it is possible to merge or blend the Catholic and Protestant liturgical paradigms that are identified by West 1997. I discussed in Chapter III some cautions about liturgical preaching that is narrowly defined as setting the stage for the Eucharist.

[¶10] **The main task of Christian preaching is not to teach the Bible but to proclaim from the Bible God’s love of the world and all the people in it, that is, the good news of Jesus the Christ. Of course some biblical teaching will take place in effective proclamation and that proclamation will support other efforts of biblical teaching and those efforts will support the proclamation.**

Ritschl 1963, 21, asserts that every sermon must be positive or it is not a sermon; it must proclaim the good news of God’s love for the people. He also proposes corrective amendments to the 1930’s codification of guidelines for biblical preaching among Protestants in Europe, 141-143. Ritschl, 147-148, further asserts that preaching in the context of the church and its faith does not mean imposing good news on the text but rather exposing the good news that God wants to reveal about his love of the world through the text and the sermon. But as Barth, one of Ritschl’s supposed homiletic codifiers of the 1930’s, 1991, 52, in his preaching seminars during that decade acknowledges regarding the temptation of preachers convinced of their own personal rectitude and theological right-thinking to major in preaching on pervasive sin and errors: “Now certainly something has to be said about human sins and errors. Yet it ought to be said from the standpoint of sin forgiven and error removed. Sin undoubtedly must be taken seriously, but forgiveness even more seriously. For either forgiveness is the first word or it is not true at all.” Further, Ritschl’s mention of God’s intention to reveal himself through the preaching of good news seems to echo Barth’s 1991, 50, 103 and passim, teaching in his homiletics seminars that God wills to reveal himself in preaching that conforms to his self-revelation in Christ as witnessed in the scriptures. Bond 2002, 62, sees similarly anthropomorphic language about what “God wants to do” through preaching from the Word in Gardner Taylor’s approach to shaping sermons according to the structure of the text which she sees as reflecting Taylor’s existentialist philosophical stance, seen especially in expressing the sinful human condition in Tillich’s terms

of loneliness: separation, estrangement, and alienation from God and from one another, and where Taylor suggests that God is no less lonely than we are, and God yearns for the same reunion that we crave, so that what God seeks through our preaching is to reclaim what belongs to him, a restored relationship with his children. Thus, according to Taylor, sermons ought to be structured “to bring the people before the presence of God and within sight of the heart of Christ.” Von Allmen 1962, 23-26, asserts that we are guided by the creeds of the church to preach Christ not the Bible. That focus on Christ is consistent with Cullmann’s 2018 [1943], 50, conclusion that according to the earliest Christian “confessions” or “rules of faith” that are mostly hidden in plain view in the texts of the New Testament, even though some of them mention not only Christ but also God and the Holy Spirit: the starting and middle point of Christian faith is faith in Christ.” And von Allmen insists that such a creedal focus on the Christ does not excuse preachers from thorough exegetical work on the whole of scripture; and he asserts that while it is possible to preach the Word of God without preaching on a scriptural text, that possibility should in no circumstance become our general practice. Jenson 1982 traces some of the changes in church hermeneutics and homiletics through the teachings of the formula of Nicaea and Chalcedon and the interpretations of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin with positive and negative consequences for approaches to the proclamation of Law and Gospel through Jesus in every text of the Bible without the aid of fantastical allegory or universally applied typology. Sloyan 1984, 40, asserts that the key to preaching biblically from a lectionary is the mystery of life in Christ, his life in this assembly. And even Luther, in discussing the power and place of the Word as compared with the power and place of the sacraments, according to Stott 1982, 23-24, does not say preach the Word but “preach Christ from the Word.” Stott 1982, 20, cites Volbeda in noting that the scriptural message is pastoral and that the preacher is

not a "speaking tube" for funneling the written word of God but a pastor whose whole being, and thus speaking, is in pastoral harmony with the pastoral word of God.

[¶11] Cannon 1991, 343, indicates that the homily is not an exposition of scripture but rather uses scripture to present an exposition of life, thus anticipating Skudlarek in the same publication, 359, Article 52. Swank 1981, 37, observes that preaching may educate but that everything apart from the gift and claim of salvation is subsidiary. Willimon 2005, 4, puts it this way: "Our problem as preachers is not that we must labor to render these strange biblical stories intelligible to modern people, but rather that these biblical stories render a God true but strange." Skudlarek 1981, 92-93, and 1991, 361, Article 63, indicates that the word homily, according to the spare use of its root *homileo* in the New Testament, suggests a conversational, intimate, informal style of address distinct from the tone of proclamation, *kerygma*, a term that is more frequently used in the New Testament. The words informal and conversational suggest a style or manner of speaking but leave open the possible structure or shape of a homily. As I mentioned above [¶ 8] and Chapter III [¶ 14], Borg observed somewhere that some homilies in contemporary Anglican and Roman Catholic churches have a simple two-part structure: first the exposition of a scriptural text and then the exhortation in the form of a contemporary story or parable to apply the teachings of that text in life. As mentioned above [¶ 9], another form of the homily or sermon is suggested by Johnson 1999, 458, where he interprets *The Letter to the Hebrews* as an extended homily, having a rhythmic structure that moves through multiple cycles of exposition followed by exhortation. That structure brings to mind a passage in Buttrick 1987, 335, where he favors the practice in the Black preaching tradition of moving rhythmically in and out of dealing with the text or telling a biblical story in present tense narrative (such as discussed in Massey 1980, 38-42) and dealing with related matters in present-day life over the two-part

structure of first the text and then the application or the propositional or point-making structure (mentioned above [¶ 9]). But the New Testament emphasis on *kerygma* (proclamation—message) and *keryssein* (proclaim—announce) does not justify the transformation of the preacher’s voice into a grating or pompous ministerial tone when he or she steps into the pulpit. A more appropriate tone for *effective* proclamation might be characterized as indicative, matter of fact, or even conversational. Fant and Pinson 1995, VI, 11, present an excerpt from Spurgeon’s lectures in which he fairly ridicules the pulpit voices, the “pompous preacher manner,” typical of some of his Victorian preaching contemporaries. On the other hand, Mitchell 1990, 88-99, in his chapter on “Personal Style in Black Preaching,” makes clear that Black Preachers will typically develop their own version of certain cultural speech characteristics in the Black preaching tradition, including tone, rhythm, and mannerisms, and he notes regarding individual speech mannerisms that “It would be surprising to hear a complaint against any of these, no matter how unusual the behavior might be in another setting.” And, of course, neither does the New Testament language justify any doomsday rant. My recommendation: be a full-time angel (= messenger from God)—always bring good tidings of great joy. People will be judged, redeemed, and rehabilitated by your joyful news. And the glory of the Lord will shine ‘round about them. And they will be filled with the fear of the Lord (= awe), and thus begin to become wise and to praise God (Luke 2:8-14, Psalm 111:10). Von Allmen 1962, 14, takes the conversational character of *homileo* in its spare use in the New Testament to mean public address that avoids shrill (high pitched) or unctuous (smooth and greasy) tones and oratorical flourishes. But Skudlarek notes that, apart from the New Testament usage, *homileo* denoted the more formal, oratorical style of classical rhetoric.

can and should be a more dialogic, conversational, and communal effort and experience than is traditionally envisioned and accomplished.

Davis 1958, 122, provides a linguistic survey of the sparse showing of dialogic or discursive forms of speech in the records of teaching and preaching in the church of the apostles. Deiss 1976, 297-303, has an interesting discussion of making the homily a time of open sharing among the congregants—of spiritual wisdom and comments on the readings—following the pattern exemplified in the ancient synagogues and the churches of New Testament times. Johnson 1999, 612-613, concludes his large work with “A Modest Proposal” for an ecclesial and fully communal hermeneutic that can follow the example of the process by which the writings themselves (Torah, Talmud, New Testament) came into existence, allowing the dialectic of experience and interpretation to take place again. He suggests that the church can learn something from Judaism by regarding the New Testament writings as crystallizations of reflection on Torah in light of the experience of Jesus as resurrected Lord, much as “The Talmud was a crystallization of a long history of interpretation of Torah mediated by new experiences.” Johnson is short on practical suggestions as to how such a historical-communal-dialogic-midrashic approach to interpretation might be implemented in the context of the church’s public worship with scripture reading and preaching. But some practical suggestions from other corners of the world of hermeneutic, homiletic, historical, and liturgical theology follow here. Keller 2015, 110-118, suggests specific dialectic strategies for preaching Christ to the culture: “Demonstrate Understanding of Doubts and Objections,” “Affirm in Order to Challenge Baseline Cultural Narratives,” and “Make Gospel Offers that Push on the Culture’s Pressure Points.” Lowry 1997, 26-28, locates the round table or conversational approach of Lucy Atkinson Rose under the heading of *The Conversational-Episodal Sermon*, the sixth category in his section on

“The Current Shape of the New Homiletic.” I note that Lowry does not use the words dialogue or dialogic in this catalogue, but I suppose that *Conversational-Episodal* would necessarily include a dialogic style of speaking as described by Swank 1981, 89-90, which I reference below [¶ 14]. Something of the conversational and dialogic style of preaching is surely included in Lowry’s category, 24-25, *The Transconscious African American Sermon*, which usually includes not only call and response but also impromptu words of encouragement to the preacher from congregants. Mitchell 1990, 31, discusses the integral element of audience participation in Black preaching and in Black music, and he notes that his Chapter 4 “The Black Approach to the Bible” is actually devoted to the subject of the Black audience.

[¶13] On the other hand, Long 2005, 34-35, protests that the dialogical element in preaching has been carried too far in “round table preaching” (John S. McClure), and in “conversational preaching in the round table church” (Lucy Atkinson Rose), and, I would add, in the staged “dialogue sermon” with one preacher standing in the pulpit and another at a lectern. Long avers that “the preacher...is called to get up from the round table, stand in the preaching spot, and prayerfully say, ‘Let the words of my mouth be acceptable in thy sight, O God. Hear now the word of God.’” And Long 2005, 142, also recommends an approach that I find much more practical and realistic than most attempts at actual dialogue in the preaching event or through sermon preparation study groups or attempts to be “dialogic” in the monologue sermon, and that is the approach of planning for and providing for the congregation’s role in creating the event of proclamation by choosing the sermon form for the particular text and situation that best allows the hearers to exercise their ministry of active and creative listening. It may not be readily clear all that such sermon preparation requires, but one requirement is absolutely clear: preachers must prepare their own sermons in real time with the people and situation of the present

congregation in the preacher's mind and heart without so much as a "sermon help" or a "lectionary aid" or another preacher's sermon outline on the same text in sight. Only so can the preacher plan and allow for the congregation's ministry of active and creative listening. And only so can the preacher ensure that the language of the sermon will reflect his or her own work of thinking rather than someone else's work of thinking. And, just to be even more clear, this does *not* mean that every sermon must address or even reference some situation in the congregation or some characteristic of the congregation. Steimle 1980, 169, discusses the dialogic nature of the Bible and, therefore, of preaching, and he cites Amos Wilder, H. H. Farmer, Martin Buber, Hendrik Kramer, and Reuel Howe on the dialogic nature of biblical faith and human communication generally, concluding with Howe's assertion that a monologue can be dialogic. It may be a challenge to try and preach in verse by verse commentary and at the same time to preach in a conversational or dialogic style and tone, but it may not be impossible. I have experienced several popular large assembly scripture scholar-teachers who were gifted at *teaching* as verse-by-verse commentary in conversational style and tone.

[¶14] How the conversational style of address suggested by the New Testament usage of *homileo* (Skudlarek) can be done effectively in modern church *preaching* can be seen in Swank 1981, 89-90, where he provides an example from his sermon on Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, I Kings 17:8-16, demonstrating that a monologue can be dialogic when it:

- looks at the story from more than one perspective but not so much in the language of analysis ("Now let us examine...") as in the language of narrative ("There's another side to this story.");
- asks rhetorical questions and in other ways addresses the audience in the first person ("You're ahead of me aren't you?");

- provokes the congregation to think of the story candidly ("What we have here, of course, are two foolish people.");
- does not begin with a proposition of some major truth or thesis, such as the providence of God, and then develop that idea by dividing it into a series of points;
- ends with a question and a statement that invites (not challenges) the congregation to make a leap of faith and trust in relation to Jesus Christ ("But is it true? There's only one way you'll ever know.").

Swank, 48, has an interesting quotation of Barclay 1968, 34-35, documenting the dialogical character of synagogue meetings and early Christian synagogue preaching referenced in the New Testament book of Acts. Barclay states that there was always a general discussion after the sermon and that the words *dispute* and *argue* often show up in the New Testament reports of those meetings. And Swank, 55, notes that the intention or decision to preach dialogically does not require completely new homiletic techniques or strategies, whether one tends toward verse-by-verse commentary or some other format. On the other hand, he does assert, 66-73, that sermons organized in the inductive form are amenable to a dialogic style of communication while the deductive form of sermon organization is not. That invites a reminder that most discursive/divisional sermons with points and illustrations do not exhibit a strictly or an overall deductive or propositional structure but are exploratory, looking at a text or a theme from several different perspectives, and are therefore closer to inductive logic than to deductive logic. Still, the following examples of Leslie Weatherhead and Donald M. Baillie indicate that a speaker may indeed help the audience to follow a combination deductive (step by step, each step logically following its predecessor) and inductive (cumulative cases or viewpoints) argument by way of dialogic or conversational interjections. A young preacher who heard Leslie Weatherhead (1893-

1976) deliver his Yale lectures on preaching described his use of transitional phrases that encouraged dialogical thinking in his audience, phrases such as, “I wonder if you will agree with me in this,” “Is this, do you think, an overstatement of the matter?” or “Will you follow me now in this further consideration of the matter?” as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 116. Another good example of dialogic style of communication in a monologic presentation can be seen in Donald M. Baillie’s introduction to his teaching sermon “The Doctrine of the Trinity” which is discussed in Massey 1980, 69-71. Massey indicates that Ballie mixes a thesis (implied) approach with a question and answer or dialogic approach in the form and style of that sermon. Massey describes the style and content of Baillie’s introduction as:

- Acknowledging that the topic/subject is not a popular one—“sounds formidable, and is apt to be uninviting.”—A disarming word is sounded, but humanly and humbly.
- Necessity to probe the subject: “But surely we ought not to shirk the task of understanding it.”
- Motivational sentence that invites further inquiry: “And I believe we can find the whole Christian Gospel summed up in this mysterious doctrine, of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one God.”
- This communal spirit is shown on the preacher’s part as he invitationally requests “Let us try.”

And I would add:

- A sense of common endeavor: “we” and “us” all the way—not an “I” or a “me” in sight.

But as useful as a dialogic or conversational style of speaking a monologic sermon may be in establishing a receptive climate of communication, Mitchell 1990, 111, is surely correct in asserting that “There is simply no dialogue when only one person is speaking.”

[¶15] Mitchell 1990, 92-93, has a brief discussion of ‘The Use of Call and Response and Repetition’ in his Chapter 6 “Personal Style in Black Preaching.” Then, 100-113, he devotes the entirety of Chapter 7 “The Black Context for Preaching” to the dialogic character of Black preaching, traceable to West African culture, under the headings of ‘Black Dialogue: A Description,’ 101-102; ‘The Familiar in Dialogue,’ 102-104; ‘Dialogue and Felt Need,’ 104-106; ‘Dialogue and Social Distance,’ 106-107; ‘Dialogue and Activism,’ 108; ‘Order in Spontaneity,’ 108-110; ‘Dialogue and Contagion,’ 110-112; ‘Dialogue as Resource,’ 112-113. Mitchell notes under the heading of ‘The Familiar in Dialogue,’ 102-104, that audible response flared up in both Black and White churches during the Great Awakenings but later faded in mainline churches possibly due to the increase of seminary education among White preachers. And Mitchell also notes that there has been some expression of the dialogic in White churches in the form of liturgical responses and some resurgence of actual sermonic dialogue in the form of sermon discussion groups. I have written about my own unsatisfactory experience with such groups in Chapter V. Mitchell 1990, 110-113, describes under the headings of ‘Dialogue and Contagion’ and ‘Dialogue as Resource,’ how essential is the active role of the Black congregation, especially those regulars who take the lead in initiating audible response to the preacher. And he describes how the freedom and ventilation of the audible response serves an essential healing function due to the repressive life situation that Black people endure in the world, including limited access to psychological therapy and other health services, as well as the liberating and enabling function that the Black church’s climate of dialogue provides for the preacher.

[¶16] It seems to me that if preachers and homiletic theologians who are not native to the Black church and the Black preaching tradition are sincere about their expressed notions of preachers arising out of the congregation and preaching being conversational, dialogic, and a

function of the preacher, the congregation, and the divine Spirit all working together, then serious consideration should be given to incorporating the way of call-and-response—preaching in such a way that audible response from members of the congregation could be invited, welcomed and evoked. That, of course, would require developing the kind of person-to-person pastoral relationship between preacher and congregation that would open the way to the audible response and empower and liberate key people to lead the way in congregational response, such as Mitchell 1990, 106-107, 110-112, discusses, under the headings of ‘Dialogue and Social Distance’ and ‘Dialogue and Contagion.’ Thus, some of the same pastoral practices that are necessary for preachers to develop a conversational or dialogic style of speaking in sermons—priestly listening by way of pastoral visits, sitting at table and breaking bread in homes or at church suppers, sitting in on small groups not led by the pastor, participation in community service organizations and community action groups, etc.—can also contribute to developing the pastor’s identity with the congregation that is necessary to make call-and-response possible. Does the thought of White preachers incorporating call-and-response in their preaching ministry raise the question of cultural appropriation? Yes, of course. Cultural borrowing and lending, donating and receiving, exchanging and sharing probably always has its awkward moments, false starts, negative reactions, etc. And, of course, it is better to be aware of our borrowing and to acknowledge our indebtedness when appropriate than to be ignorant and thus insensitive. But Mitchell 1990, 133, is quite generous and graceful in his assurance that the distinctive Black preaching tradition “will offer much to all traditions and will receive much from those traditions in return, until in the providence of God we become one.” And as he wrote, 15, after reporting, 14, on some mixed results from efforts to impose cultural assimilation in some precincts of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: “*Acculturation rather than intellectual imperialism* is the

preferred process.” Further, call-and-response in Christian preaching goes all the way back to the spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, of the early church, according to Deiss 1976, 287:

“Origen himself did not hesitate to stop in the middle of his homily and ask his hearers: ‘Help me with your prayer so that I may really speak God’s word to you’” (also cited below [¶ 89]). And call-and-response and other forms of audience participation are familiar adjuncts of preaching in the wake of the pentecostal, charismatic, and enthusiastic movements, as well as various awakenings, revivals and church revitalizations in history.

[¶17] I mention near the end of this Chapter Swank's and Steimle's discussions of the use of sermon preparation and feedback groups to enhance a dialogic style and conversational tone in preaching. One way to establish a worshipful setting for dialogic or conversational style in the minister's sermon is to embrace Lischer's 2001, 76-92, definition of the preaching of the church as all the ways that the church talks to itself in worship, study and fellowship as the church conducts its internal life, addresses the callings of its members in the world and conducts its corporate witness of mission and ministry in the world *in an ongoing process of the church's formation as a community of faith*. I have suggested in Chapter III [¶ 85] that there is theological basis for Lischer's perspective in G. Ernest Wright 1952, 28-29, where he describes how in the religious assemblies of Israel participation in the communal recital of God's redemptive actions in history facilitates the individual's encounter with God in a personal experience of redemption and renewal. Under Lischer's broad communal definition of the church's preaching, the sermon by the pastor may be characterized as a kind of “dress rehearsal” for the larger work of preaching done by the whole church, according to Lischer. A somewhat conversational and sometimes dialogic style in the sermon by the minister would certainly seem appropriate if not always necessary in this understanding of what constitutes the preaching of the church as a faith

community in formation. One key to a conversational climate in worship and preaching is a conversational approach to theological interpretation and sermon preparation, on which see Ronald Allen 1998, 63-150, which I reference in Chapter V [¶ 2]. Allen, 67, n. 2 (299), has an extensive list of references “for nuances in the contemporary preaching community’s growing understanding of preaching as conversation.” I have referenced in Book II, n. 19 [¶ 2] Barth’s 1991, 45-46, 50, discussion of why preaching should be considered as announcement rather than proclamation unless the preacher has been so drawn into the event of God’s self-revelation that he or she is called to be a herald (proclaimer) of God’s proclamation. But, contrary to the positive history and value of the conversational or dialogic style attributed to the word homily, there is a long-standing general perception that a homily is something less authoritative and less powerful than the preaching of the gospel in a sermon. Brilioth 1965a, 122, refers to a rubric in Luther’s German Mass that implicitly and desultorily reflects the commonly perceived distinction between homily and sermon: “After this (Luther’s metrical version of the Creed) the sermon follows; but ‘since preachers full of the Spirit are few,’ a homily may be read in its place.” Thompson 1971, 104, 132, reports Luther’s fuller explanation of this provision. The same distinction is seen in language of the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 as cited by Maxwell 1949, 146: “...a sermon was to be preached or a homily read.” That text from the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 may be seen in Thompson 1971, 272. (I have also cited these examples in Chapter III [¶ 42].) There is a strange disjunction here: a tone of lively conversation or dialogue between the speaker and the hearers can hardly be sounded when the speaker reads a homily written by someone else, perhaps from a book of stock homilies, a homilarium.

[¶18] **Preaching that dwells on the record of Israel’s memory and the church’s memory of what God has done in the past while failing to**

announce what God does and intends in the present and future is simply not biblical.

Sometimes preaching exegetically from biblical texts may tend to focus on God's past action to the exclusion of God in the here and now. Buttrick 1987, 115, challenges the biblical theology movement's God-who-has-acted-in-history theology as tending to reduce preaching to a report of previous revelation events rather than being an occasion when God chooses to reveal himself through the preacher's use of the biblical symbols that have shaped present social consciousness. In fact, the mantra chanted by some preeminent biblical theology champions was not God-who-has-acted-in-history but God-who-acts-in-history as reflected in the title of G. Ernest Wright 1952. As Lowry 1985, 35, observes, citing Norman Perrin 1963, 160-161, "In the Old Testament, time is punctiliar..." (punctiliar = punctilious). Perrin explains what punctiliar means for the Hebrew concept of time: "It (time) is conceived of as a series of moments or seasons each one of which is connected with a particular event. There can be no time without an event, and no event without a time." Continuing with Lowry's report on Perrin: "They (the Hebrews) thought in a linear manner only in the sense that they put together the sequence of events in which God had acted." Moreover, "With the coming of the prophets something new is added... They claim that his hand is also *and equally* at work in the events of their own day." Finally, "They proclaim a future and even climactic salvation activity of God on behalf of his people." One of G. Ernest Wright's refrains in his Old Testament survey lectures at McCormick Theological Seminary was that the mode of the priestly orations that were part of the Hebrew cultus when "all Israel was assembled" was *rehearsal* or *recital* of all that God had done in history and all that God would now do for, in, and through his people in view of all that God has promised to do in Israel's future. Similarly, with respect to Christian preaching, Massey 1980, 38-42, discusses the

significance in the preaching of the Black church of present tenseness and personal identification with the narrative in the telling of biblically based stories, citing Exodus 13:8 “You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” And Lowry 1997, 29, quotes Paul Sherer (1892-1969): God “is not intent on sharing conceptual truth...; it is himself he wants to bestow.” So, preaching is “recital.” Borg 2001, 48-49, affirms that the stories of the Hebrew Bible and those of the New Testament are about the divine-human relationship in the present and not just in the past events reported in those stories, a view which he notes the Jews assert specifically in the present-day liturgy of the Passover: “...we, all of us gathered here tonight, were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt,...and were led out by the great and mighty hand of God.” And Borg interprets: “...the exodus story...portrays bondage as a perennial human problem and proclaims God’s will that we be liberated from bondage.” Similarly, Borg explains how there is something more important in the stories of the New Testament than their factual accuracy and empirical consistency and that is what they are telling us about the divine-human relationship in the now. And if Zuurdeeg 1958, 190-191, is correct in observing that the message of the biblical theology movement is that the Bible is not simply a God-who-speaks oracle typical of some ancient religions but is rather a witness to the continuing activity of God among people, then Buttrick is correct in faulting any preaching that focuses on scriptural exposition as if the Bible were an oracle of sayings by or about a God who has spoken in the past but who is not alive and active in the present, but he is surely wrong to blame the biblical theology movement or the post Vatican II liturgical renewal and spread of lectionary preaching for such distortions. As to bearing witness to what God does vs. what God says, it is well to consider Long’s 2004, 75, assertion: “When God acts, the action is speechlike in the sense that an invitation is issued, something is summoned, someone is called to and a response is

demanded.” But, of course, as the word biblical suggests, most of the discussion by the scholars in the biblical theology movement referred to the past actions of God as recorded in scripture. Yet, as the words theology and movement suggest, the discussion was about the knowledge of God in the here and now as well as in the there and then.

[¶19] **Assumptions of a necessary conflict between a scientific view of history and nature and a faith-based view of God directing development in nature and events in history may be qualified by a consideration of the uncertainty principle of subatomic physics and when God is seen not only as transcending all that is but also as present and alive in all that is including people.**

Diogenes Allen 1989, 165-181, in his chapter on “Divine Agency in a Scientific World,” purports to show that “Bultmann and those who have sought to square the Bible with science so that modern man can believe the gospel with intellectual integrity are misinformed about the implications of modern science.” It was once conventional wisdom to think that the continuing development of modern science tended toward an understanding of the universe as operating by an impersonal system that is impervious to both human and divine agency, that is, that neither God nor humans could ultimately determine nor influence events or eventual outcomes in nature and history. But Allen, 167-171, uses the uncertainty principle from subatomic physics, citing nuclear physicist Pollard 1958, and a crude example provided by G. E. M. Anscombe and Robert King, of a man pumping lethal poison into the water system of a house where some people are plotting to start a war. The purpose of the reference to the uncertainty principle and the “crude example” which includes a hypothetical chain of logic based on questions posed to the man pumping the poisoned water, and answers that might be given by the man is to show that the causal laws of nature and intentional action by humans are different kinds of accounts. Allen’s case is that if the man operating the pump handle could change the course of history by

murdering the people in the house who were planning a war then the course of human history is not simply controlled by random impersonal forces but rather can be influenced by personal human actions; and since that is so the immanent God who is present and active in everything that is also has agency in the life of the world. Thus, while most of the history of the universe has not been influenced by human intentions, yet since the beginning of human presence in the universe personal explanations are necessary in some instances to identify what is happening. And Allen reasons that if human agency is not ruled out even by the closed system views of classical modern science, then neither is divine agency so ruled out. Allen, 171-181, moves on from that observation to invoke the belief in the Christian biblical faith that the transcendent God who is above and beyond and before all things and who created all things “in the beginning” is also the immanent God who is a sustaining presence in all that God has created. That is, for Allen it is important to keep in mind that God is not a member of the universe and also to keep in mind that God is present and working within every member of the universe as Creator and Sustainer. Thus, while humans are external to the things that humans manipulate in order to influence events in nature and history, God is a living presence in every member of the universe that God has created and that, therefore, divine agency is present and active everywhere at all times. Thus, God not only encompasses everything (Borg 2003, 70) but God also indwells everything. I discuss a contrast between Allen’s approach and Borg’s approach below. Allen, 118-119, acknowledges that God’s actions and intentions in human events are not easy to discern and may require a series of events over a relatively long period of time to become clear, unlike the case with the actions of humans which can be observed immediately. And he submits as an example “the incident reported in Genesis in which Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. It is only near the end of his life that Joseph realizes the way God uses this event to save his family

from starvation.” Further, 179-181, Allen even goes so far as to make an argument from the perspective of “faith seeking understanding” (181) and since “We are all intended to become holy” (179), that is, I assume, set apart and adopted/adapted to serve as God’s vessels and instruments for the accomplishment of God’s intentions, it may be that holy people have the power to do things such as restore sight to the blind, heal diseases, command storms and seas without disrupting nature or history, even though such powers and actions may seem to the modern mind to violate nature and disrupt the continuity of history.

[¶20] Diogenes Allen’s analysis is, indeed, quite a different take on the New Testament witness from that which is the basis of Bultmann’s demythologization program, which I discuss at some length in Chapter II, and from the historical/metaphorical/sacramental matrix laid out in Borg 2001 and 2003. For example, Borg 2003, 121-123, seems to suggest that the amazing healings, restorations, consummations, reunions and reconciliations in the deeds and parables of Jesus point symbolically to a New Life “sometimes called sanctification” of continued spiritual growth and development in persons initially transformed by “dying and rising” in a “born again” spiritual experience, as the result of being grasped by the Spirit upon receiving the good news of justification by God in the life death and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ, that is, a life “in Christ,” as the apostle Paul has it, marked by (citing Scroggs 1977, 21-38): freedom, joy, peace, and love, but not a life marked by supernatural powers, yet a most attractive and delightful life indeed. Allen, 180-181, makes a noble effort to lend some rationality and tentativeness to what he has said about special powers for holy people in general and the incarnate Word of God in particular by putting some boundaries around his exceptionalism.

[¶21] **An existentialist perspective on personal experience of God through encounter with Jesus Christ can help to clarify and confirm the nature**

and importance of personal testimony or faith-sharing in Christian witness to the world.

Bultmann 1958, in the final chapter, “God as Acting,” observes, 62-66, that the notion of seeing God at work in nature and in human events seems a lot like pantheism but differs from pantheism in that it is the Christian’s encounter with God in God’s word (*logos*) in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit’s grace of faith that enables the Christian to see God’s action generally in nature and particularly in history. And he notes that such action of God is hidden from the believer just as much as from the nonbeliever, except as God addresses the believer in the here and now through his word and Spirit (in Christian preaching!). And, 65, he affirms “This is the paradox of faith, that faith ‘nevertheless’ understands as God’s action here and now an event which is completely intelligible in the natural or historical connection of events,” a paradox which, incidentally, refutes the pale notion of faith as an optional filler of the gap between what can be explained by scientific observation and analysis and that which science has *not yet* been able to explain. It may seem strange at first glance to see how Bultmann uses the language of existentialist philosophy to affirm that people of the Christian faith may only express their perceptions of God at work in nature and history and in current events and in one’s own life in existential terms, that is, in terms of their own encounter and relationship with God in the here and now of one’s own embrace of existence. First: notice the distinction that Bultmann, 66, 74, makes between existential—the personal here and now self-understanding—and existentialist—philosophical analysis of human existence. Second: notice that while Bultmann, 77, writes that one can and must decide to exist, that is, embrace the reality of one’s own being, one cannot decide to have faith as complete openness to the future; that faith must be given in the forgiveness of sins, which is the only way one can be free from the chains and recriminations of

the past and present, and, thereby, open to the eschatological “future” fulfilled in the here and now faith experience of life in Christ—a new self-understanding (80-81) which I also cite in Chapter II [¶ 19]. Third: strange, yes, but for me Bultmann’s existentialist language is a helpful reminder that my witness to the Christian message should reflect my personal ownership of how I am perceiving God with “eyes of faith” (Minear 1946) at the present time, whatever the text, subject, or issue may be. An existentialist perspective can help us adhere to a conviction that we are not called to prove God’s existence or action or to argue someone into the faith, but rather simply to tell of our own encounter with God and perception of God’s presence and action in the world and in our life. This is not only important in face-to-face conversations, whether with individuals or groups, whether with fellow believers or skeptics, whether with believers of our own theological ilk or of another, but it is also important in preaching and teaching. Of course, facts may be presented as facts, either self-evident or backed up by external evidence. That includes presenting stories, images, metaphors, theological arguments, ancient and modern texts, quotations, etc., as facts or products that exist. But our perceptions and experiences of God in relation to such data must be presented in the form of witness and testimony, or as interpretation and opinion, in which we own that “this is how I experience God and how I perceive God at work in the world or in relation to the article that we are talking about.”

[¶22] **Effective communication style in Christian faith-sharing and in expository preaching can be improved and maintained by keeping certain scripture texts in mind and by practicing communication techniques taught by modern psychologists.**

In addition to the help that we may get from Bultmann’s existentialist philosophical perspective, there are three texts that can help us to keep faithful talk of our experience and perception of God’s presence and action in the form of owned opinion and interpretation or humble witness

and testimony: Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” and John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who has made him known” and 1 John 4:12: “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” I also find good help in a technique from transactional analysis, a psychological teaching that was popular a few decades ago: the importance of using “I messages” rather than “you messages” when we want to influence others by sharing with them a perspective or an experience or an encounter that is ours but one that we cannot transmit to others except by invitation and attraction. This, of course does not exclude the mainly indicative and broadly factual statements about things, people, events, concepts, texts, challenges, consequences, etc., that can and must be made in the process of proclaiming the gospel in expository preaching. But we should also keep in mind that when statements are made about God’s presence and activity whether in the past, present, or future, these are not statements of fact that are either self-evident or that can be backed up by hard evidence. They are statements of faith. The prophets, apostles, and Jesus were all people of faith who bore witness to their experience of God in their life and in the life of their communities, and the world. The Bible reports faithful witnesses to God’s presence, purposes and action, as well as reflecting much self-evidently factual information about history and nature, but does not always reflect a discrete awareness of the division between factual reportage and faithful interpretation and experience. But we preachers today are called to make that distinction clear as much as possible by the grammar and syntax that we use.

[¶23] **Effective communication of messages derived from scripture may be helped by an understanding of human consciousness derived from the modern philosophical category of phenomenology.**

Craddock 1983, 123, wrote “The sermon is not...an exposition of the text but a proclamation of that which the text proclaims.” Yet, in 2010, 109-110, he provides some positive guidance on when to incorporate textual matters in the sermon. Buttrick 1987, 374-375, and in other writings, for example in 1992, 54, 134, seems to suggest that exegetical explanations such as he claims to keep to the minimum necessary in his writings on homiletic theology may usually be eliminated altogether from sermons: “When we preach in the reflective mode we need not include gobs of biblical discussion. A passage has formed a structure of contemporary understanding in consciousness and our sermons evolve from that structure in consciousness.” Yet, the same 1992 work of homiletic theology where Buttrick claims to keep exegetical details to a minimum clearly reflects extensive and deep exegetical knowledge and analysis. Greenhaw 1996, 1-16, helped me to get a better grasp of the phenomenology that is the philosophical framework of Buttrick’s approach and contribution to homiletic theology and practice. Dictionaries define phenomenology as the study of the development of human consciousness and self-awareness. Palmer 1997, 145, notes that the word phenomenology means literally the study of appearances. This coheres with the illustration presented by Greenhaw 1996, 5, that what we see in any one view of a ship in a harbor could actually be a two-dimensional movie set or stage backdrop. A guide to the classical roots and the modern expressions of phenomenology can be seen in Allen and Springsted 2007 by checking out phenomena, phenomenism, and phenomenology in the Index. In particular, they have a useful discussion, 196-207, of the influence of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) on theology and especially on the development of the modern science of hermeneutics in the last half of the twentieth century.

[¶24] Borg 1999, 60, n. 19, 257, uses the term phenomenological (what is perceived) as distinct from ontological (what exists—the way things really are) to qualify his statement about

people whom he terms mystics because they have direct experiences of the sacred, that is, “people for whom the sacred was, to use William James’ terms, a firsthand religious experience rather than a secondhand belief.” Borg allows that one may postpone judgment or judge in either direction as to whether such claimed experience is also ontological—the way things really are. Allen and Springsted 1997, 30-31, make it clear that “appearances”—what we see—may include things that are what they appear to be as well as things that are not. Borg’s interlocutor, N. T. Wright 1999, 126, almost tipped his hat to phenomenology when he wrote “Of course the truth of Christianity is not just about past events. But take the past events away, and the other layers of truth begin to disintegrate.” Or as Wright notes, 217, “for the first-century Jewish worldview, within which we can most credibly situate Jesus and his first followers, rich symbolic meanings were to be found precisely within actual events.” That is, for Christians, most of whom might not think of themselves as mystics or spirit people, experience of the God who acts is anchored partly in the knowledge of the God who has acted in history, provided they have not banished God to history and the Bible. One might ask how Buttrick’s philosophical stance in phenomenology shows up in his homiletic theology. So, here is a major example: For Buttrick, preaching must address people in terms of what is experienced in consciousness and not just their experience of what can be seen, heard, and touched or what is written in a book or taught in the schools. Allen and Springsted 2007, xv-xvi, discuss the ontological difference between God and creation and note that while fictional characters and decoy ducks do exist, that is, are ontological realities, we do make ontological distinctions between a fictional character and an actual person and between a decoy and a real live duck. Sensing 2003 observes in note 16 that “Phenomenology is not the only ontological approach available. Most New Homiletical literature opts for a narrativ ontology.” Since Willimon 2005, 46, is writing theologically with emphasis

on the incarnational character of God's self-revelation in Scripture (It is written in John 1:18 that "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." [NRSV]), I read him phenomenologically and figuratively, and I claim spiritually and faithfully by God's gift, rather than ontologically or literally when he writes "Scripture thinks that our greatest need is to be with the God who, in Jesus Christ has shown such remarkable determination to be with us."

[¶25] **The extremes of widely divergent approaches to developing sermons from scriptural texts have tended to blur the definitions and weaken the distinctions among the categories or types of biblically based sermons and the all-important difference between sermons and Bible lectures.**

The two extremes mentioned earlier [¶s 2 - 8]—using the scripture text as springboard for a topical or thematic sermon and presenting a running exegetical commentary on the scripture text—can be seen in the scholastic preaching of the middle ages and, according to Fant and Pinson 1995, I, 231-235, are known technically as declaring (treating a text under a theme divided into heads) and postillating (giving a verse by verse explanation and analysis of a text). I consider both of these approaches to be distortions or caricatures of expository preaching and not reflective of the truest and best of expository preaching in Christian history. The persistence of these two "caricatures" into the 20th century has led homiletic theologians such as Buttrick, Craddock, Steimle, and Don Wardlaw to speak of preaching biblically or preaching from scripture rather than preaching expositively. They seem to think that the word expository is no longer useful. Davis 1958, 32, and others had earlier noted the limited usefulness of the terms topical, textual, and expository. Any distinction between textual and expository based on length of passage is put to rest by Massey 1980, 50, in his chapter headed "Designing the Textual/Expository Sermon" and in a quote from Stevenson 1967, 146, "The distinction between textual and expository

preaching, based on length alone, is artificial and should be abandoned. All biblical preaching is at the same time textual and expository; it is based upon a text which it expounds.” It is noteworthy that Ronald Allen 1996 responds to the Buttrick-Farley reservations concerning preaching on biblical passages by discussing "Values of Preaching from Passages of the Bible" *without himself using the word expository*. Barth 1991 and Bonhoeffer 1975 make strong cases in their turns at teaching homiletics in the 1930’s for going with the flow of the scriptural text while eschewing thematic and topical preaching as well as any subject divisions in their suggested sermons and any rhetorical logic such as thesis and antithesis, as well as any rhetorical flourishes such as introductions, conclusions, and illustrations. Barth’s 1991, 107, sketch of a sermon on Psalm 121 is quite simply an example of a verse-by-verse approach. He observes, 121, (Yes. Psalm 121 in the previous sentence and page 121 of Barth in this sentence. It’s not a typo.) that when the preacher simply follows the path of the text rather than organizing the whole and parts of the sermon rhetorically the one thing that holds the sermon together as a totality is the Word of God, that is, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh as encountered in the written Word. Yet, 126, he allows that the sermon need not always follow the schematic trajectory of the text from first to last, verse by verse; if the heart of the content is in the middle of the text or at the end, one may start there and work backward and forward as needed. The approaches of Barth and Bonhoeffer might be characterized as somewhere between verse by verse commentary, or simply following the narrative flow or train of thought in the text, and what later homileticians guided by the new hermeneutics would call structuring the sermon according to the structure of the text, that is, with a similar performative intention to that of the text, even though Barth 1991, 102-104, rejects the practice of trying to identify an intention or target or a theme (scopus) in an individual passage of scripture. Nevertheless, the two theological geniuses were recognized as effective preachers

because of the always compelling content of their messages, which affirms the dictum that the first law and a *sine qua non* of effective public speaking is having something to say that is worth saying and saying it with authentic conviction and integrity. Massey 1980, 34, quotes from Charles Haddon Spurgeon's lectures on preaching: "We do not enter the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; we have instructions to convey important to the last degree, and we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. . . . The true minister of Christ knows that the true value of a sermon must lie, not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth it contains." Spurgeon used a variety of approaches in developing sermons from scriptural texts. His running commentary on a whole book of the Bible in the sermon "Providence as Seen in...Esther" shows that verse by verse preaching can have a unitary thematic and theological focus rather than merely a string of disjointed exegetical notes. That sermon manuscript or transcription can be seen in Fant and Pinson 1995, VI, 61-73. Stott 1982, 317-320, and Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 139, n. 16, make cases for viable adaptations of verse-by-verse expository preaching in the 20th and 21st centuries when treated as "a subdivision of the more general category of expository preaching."

[¶26] But even the most thoughtful structuring of verse-by-verse preaching, such as discussed by Barth and Bonhoeffer and by Stott and by Allen and Bartholomew, tends to blur the distinction between sermon and Bible lecture. Robinson 2001, 104, 170-172, gives sound advice: "Remember that you are not lecturing to people about the Bible. You are talking to people about themselves from the Bible." And he gives some examples of transposing exegetical statements about a text to homiletical statements for sermon development. Craddock 2010, 127 and elsewhere, asserts that sermons should not be designed for the text to be explained but rather to help the text continue as a living presence in the lives of the hearers. He suggests as a sermon evaluation question: "Were the hearers led into and out of the text and returned to their home

addresses.” And in 2011, 192-193, he advises against explaining the stories, images, metaphors, and hyperboles of one’s speech. “It’s like a person telling a joke and then explaining the joke. I would rather not get the joke than to have you explain it to me. Sermons that are full of explanations are dull and they are boring...” (also referenced below [¶67]). It seems to me that a person assigned to give a Bible lecture at a Christian conference may be forgiven—or more likely thanked—for occasionally lapsing into preaching or at least witnessing to personal faith in Christ; but giving a lecture when one has been called upon to preach a sermon or share a personal testimony in a worship service exposes a genre confusion that invites a gentle rebuke and a loving communal correction. The imperative for preachers to mind the distinction between sermon and lecture is asserted most forcefully and articulated most clearly in the following quote of Robert McCracken (1904-1973) seen in Fant and Pinson 1995 XII, 61, citing Paul D. Eppinger 1968:

There is a difference between a pulpit and a platform, a sermon and a lecture, a church and an auditorium. The Christian preacher is not a lineal descendant of the Greek orator. The obligation that rests on him is not, like Socrates, to follow the argument wherever it may lead, but like Micah, to declare, “Thus said the Lord.” His first business is as the herald of a revelation.

Yet, at the same time, Fant and Pinson, 63, make clear that part of what made McCracken himself an effective herald of the revelation in Christ was that he was a skilled craftsman in certain elements held most dearly by rhetoricians: the clarity of structure and the smoothness of transitions in his messages that made it easy for hearers to follow his line of thinking. Thus, effective preaching and effective lecturing are distinct forms with distinct purposes but may also share common or parallel elements. The distinction between lecturing and preaching is also powerfully stated by Gerald Kennedy (1907-1980) as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 147 (adapted for gender neutrality and inclusiveness):

The Christian preacher is the proclaimer of an occurrence which was nothing less than God breaking into the processes of life to reveal Godself supremely in a Person. If the

pulpit loses its power, it is always when it loses its sense of God proclaiming this Event, through a person to people. ...

The preacher is not just a person with some ideas to proclaim about God or some information to impart concerning a philosophy of life. They are the agent through whom God probes and challenges. They are the voice through which God shows Godself as a consuming fire and offers Godself as a very present help in time of trouble, through Jesus Christ. Preaching is confronting humankind's tragic inadequacy with God's redeeming grace.

Kennedy's perspective seems to partake of both Barth's Word of God revelation view of preaching and of Bonhoeffer's Christ mysticism view of preaching that allows the Spirit of the risen Christ to walk among the congregation during the sermon.

[¶27] **Some contemporary approaches in biblical hermeneutics and newer homiletic strategies can help preachers develop sermons that both set forth God's action and intentions for the first hearers/readers of the message of the text and also the good news implications of those divine actions and intentions for the hearers-of/participants-in today's sermon.**

Wilson 2007, 31-34, writes of preaching as distinct from lecturing on the Bible in that preaching is an event intended to foster an encounter with God; and, xi-xiii, in the Preface to the Revised Edition of his homiletics textbook, he states that part of the purpose of the revision is to resolve the supposed distinction between preaching the text and preaching the gospel by asserting that we are called to do both, and he intends to describe what that means and discuss how to do it, which purpose and direction he lays out more specifically, 5-53, in Chapters One, Two, and Three on "Biblical Exegesis," "The purpose of Preaching," and "The Gospel and the Theme Sentence." And, 229-262, in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen on "Steps Toward the Gospel" and "Preaching the Gospel," he discusses how to prepare a sermon for preaching both the text and the gospel by, among other strategies and disciplines, following historical and literary exegesis of the text with theological exegesis—what is God doing or intending in the text or behind the text?—and composing the sermon with a gospel hermeneutic—where is the good news in this text? The

notion of theological exegesis of texts is consistent with and a natural outgrowth of the preaching of the biblical prophets and apostles whose genius was to exegete history theologically—what was God doing in or behind the things that have happened with Israel and its neighbors and with Christ, the church, and the world—as discussed by G. Ernest Wright 1952, 81-83, with reference to the prophets and as discussed by Dodd 1937 (1962) with reference to the apostles. Thus, it seems to me that literary/historical exegesis is not complete until it exposes what the prophet, the priest, the scribe, or the apostle saw God doing in the history of events that he recounts since their account is a *confessional* (that is, faith-based) recital, as Wright has it. What the contemporary preacher has to contribute by way of his or her theological exegesis of the text during sermon preparation is what he or she sees God doing or intending in the text on the basis of his or her faith-based experience and knowledge of the living God. Theology = God-knowledge, knowledge of God, or the study of anything in relation to or in light of the knowledge/experience of God. Thus, it might be said that the preacher adds a third level of inference on the basis of reading the text through his or her faith experience of God as the creator and director of whatever exists and happens in the world. That is, first, the biblical writers as historians inferred from their sources—communal memories and documents—what must have happened in the distant past; second, the biblical writers inferred on the basis of their faith experience of the living God what God must have been doing or intending in the events of the distant past, and then third, the present day preacher infers on the basis of his or her faith experience of the sovereign God, that is, theological exegesis, what God must be doing or intending for the present community in the text and in the things that are happening among them and being done by the people of the present community and world. G Ernest Wright 1952, 106, sums up his two chapters on “What God has Done” and “What Man has Done” in this way:

The Biblical concentration on history as the acts of God involves also the story of what man has done. As the Biblical ‘doctrine’ of God is primarily a recital of what he has done together with the inferences drawn from it, so also is the ‘doctrine’ of man. But ‘doctrine’ in this sense has its own special and particular character, which allows for flexibility and variety in modes of expression and insight and which necessitates the use of narration to depict what is involved.

[¶28] Wright, 108, acknowledges that there really is a problem and a challenge of getting from the Bible’s mode of recital and narrative of God’s acts in history to the articulation of an intelligible faith in the modern church and the modern world, a church and world which are more Hellenic than Hebraic in our ways of thinking. And he indicates that it is a task for Christian philosophy and systematic theology (and, therefore, preachers) to analyze and interpret the faith in its many aspects and to make its relevance to modern people apparent—N.B., not make the faith relevant but make its relevance apparent. And Wright asserts: “Theology may perhaps be defined as the discipline by which the Church, carefully and with full knowledge of the risk, translates Biblical faith into the non-Biblical language of another age. It is an extension of the Bible into the non-Biblical world.” Thus, the philosopher-theologian-preacher must do the work of bridging in the sermon preparation workshop if not in the pulpit (also cited in Chapter II [¶11]). Wilson, 229-246, in Chapter Twelve, “Steps Toward the Gospel,” provides guidance for doing what he calls theological exegesis of the text, cultivating the ability to think theologically as one deals with the text and the preaching situation, identifying one’s own theological stance, path, and progress, and how to incorporate basic theological doctrines of the church in one’s sermon development and preaching schedule. And, 247-262, in Chapter Thirteen, “Preaching the Gospel,” he provides specific guidance for interpreting the text in sermon composition with a “gospel hermeneutic,” that is, reading every text through the lens of the good news of healing, wholeness, and hope for the world in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and relating that gospel message to both the text of the day and the preaching situation of the day,

as well as relating that message to the Bible as a whole, i.e., 247, “the larger faith story.”

[¶29] **The widely and long abused word expository can be salvaged and rehabilitated by highlighting facets of its definition other than textual explanation and by recognizing that expository sermons may come in various forms including narrative, argumentation, image development, and points with illustrations, and can include sermons developed from starting places other than a scheduled or selected scripture text, that is, sermons whose development started with a life situation or a public topical issue or a theological teaching to be addressed. If some scriptural text is used as a main reference point for guiding the development of a sermon of any of the above types or forms or developmental starting places, and if the essential thrust and original intention of that text is clearly set forth at some place in the sermon, that sermon is expository.**

Rather than avoid the word expository because it is popularly taken to mean explanatory, I prefer to follow Donald G. Miller 1957, 17-36, who cites the earlier work of Alfred E. Garvie and James Coffin Stout in rehabilitating the word expository by using its broader definition of setting forth the message rather than the narrower one of merely explaining the text. Of course, it is useful to vary one’s language with other expressions such as biblical preaching rather than expository preaching, which Miller does in the title of his book and in the subtitle of the first chapter.

Therefore, I use the word expository with an emphasis on dictionary terms other than explain, namely set forth and expose. *Expono*, the Latin root of expose does mean to explain. But it should also be noted that it is a combination of *ex* (from or out of) and *pono*, to put or place, literally to put aside or lay down. Therefore, *expono* not only means to explain but also to put out, to put aside, to cast out, to put on view, to display, according to *Cassell’s New Latin Dictionary* 1960.

Donald G. Miller 1957, 36, cites the definition of expound in *Webster’s New International Dictionary*: “to lay open the meaning of.” Thus, the purpose of expository preaching is to set forth or lay open the message of the word of scripture rather than explain that word. It is

unfortunate that the New Revised Standard Version has the word *explaining* in 2 Timothy 2:15 as a replacement of *handling* which the RSV has to replace *dividing* in the KJV. The following translations are preferable to those in the KJV, the RSV, and the NRSV: Message - *laying out*, New English - *proclamation*, Good News - *teaching*, Contemporary English - *teaches*, and Jerusalem - *kept a straight course with*. Since Paul was advising Timothy on faithfulness in the work of Christian teaching and preaching, a good modern paraphrase might use the expression *effectively communicating* rather than *rightly explaining*. Sangster 1951, 34, has a much higher, broader, and deeper definition of a scripturally based sermon than mere explanation of the text: “a manifestation of the Incarnate Word, *from the written Word*, by the spoken word” (also cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 335), which brings to mind Bonhoeffer’s 1975, 126, 128, Christ and textual mystical sacramentalism: a sermon should allow Jesus and the text to walk around among the congregation. Sounds a lot like proclamation of the gospel, doesn’t it? As Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 16, wrote, “And although we may often discuss subjects and aspects of subjects which are not presented in precisely that form by any passage of Scripture, yet the fundamental conception should be habitually retained, that we are about to set forth what the text contains.” Notice, please: set forth, not explain! And note further, 19, “to explain merely for the sake of explaining is a task for which the preacher scarcely has time.” The complexity and challenge of expository preaching is well stated in Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 153: “To make a discourse which shall be both explanatory and oratorical, bearing a rich mass of details but not burdened with them, full of Scripture and abounding in practical applications, to bring even dull, uninformed, and unspiritual minds into interested and profitable contact with an extended portion of the Bible—of course this must be difficult.” Massey 1980, 22-23, 53, makes clear that an expositional sermon may indeed be explanatory, argumentative, narrative, or dialogic

in form depending on the nature of the text. But he insists that the sermon must also center on some one emphasis in a text, “purposefully treating a teaching, an insight, a promise, a hope, a warning, a character, an experience, a meaning, a prophecy, a virtue, a key word, and so on.” And he writes “The best exposition draws attention to the light that is in the Word of God, while at the same time calling attention to the human situation and promise of hope because of that light.”

Lowry 1997, 29-38, has a chapter “TASK - - - - GOAL” in which he makes a distinction between preaching and proclamation, with preaching being what the preacher does and proclamation being what the preaching is intended to accomplish in the hearers. Setting forth rather than explaining the message of a scripture passage is what Lowry refers to as a *traditional* approach to expository preaching, preaching in which the intention is the *transmission* of the truth. Lowry also discusses *kerygmatic* preaching in which the intention is the *mediation* of God’s address to people, and *transformational* preaching in which the intention is *evocation* of experiential event. Lowry is careful to note that the preacher cannot ensure that his or her preaching will evoke the intended transformative experience of proclamation in the hearers, a point that he reiterates, 88, when discussing the final section of the plotted sermon. That acknowledgement goes some distance toward reconciling Lowry’s distinction between preaching and proclamation with the dictum of Ezekiel 2:5: “Whether they hear or refuse to hear...they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.” Massey 1974, who insists, 84, that a sermon that lives must be rooted in the Word of God, also reports, 101-102, in his chapter on “Delivery: Insights From the Black Preaching Tradition” that “in the black church *the sermon is functional*:

That is, the sermon is never regarded as a product for its own sake, or even as an art form, but as a means to an end. And that end? The end of the sermon as preached in the black church is to help some person: initiate someone into the faith, instruct some person on how to live, inspire some person to go on living with hope despite troubles and strain, give insight into problems and possibilities within and beyond those problems. The sermon is functional in its intent to liberate the hearer’s spirit, give him life and sustain

his faith.

[¶30] I note that in none of these approaches to preaching is it the primary task or function of the sermon to simply explain a passage of scripture, although as Broadus and Weatherspoon have mentioned, sermons may indeed contain some scriptural explanations. But in all approaches to expository preaching any exegetical explanations should be examined as to whether they contribute to the task and goal of the sermon and, if not, omitted from the sermon. If exposition is thought of as simply explanation, there is the hazard that a preacher will attempt to explain something that he does not understand or something that is not true or something that cannot be explained, according to Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 156. How many counties in the United States have renamed their fair grounds “Expo Center” or “Exposition Square” or some such moniker? Many! Agricultural, industrial, and trade expositions are places and occasions where products can be explained, it is true. But first and mainly they are places where products can be displayed, exhibited, seen, touched, and experienced. An expository sermon must not be a mere explanation of a text. It can and should be an “expo center” for displaying or exhibiting or setting forth the good news that may be hiding in plain view in a scripture text. Donald G. Miller 1957, 22, insists that the word expository refers to the substance of the sermon—the gospel—rather than to the form, such as explanation of a text, and he quotes Marvin R. Vincent’s work, *The Expositor in the Pulpit* (a reprint can now be seen in Bryson 1999): “Exposition is *exposing* the truth contained in God’s word: *laying it open; putting it forth* where the people may get hold of it...” According to Vincent, “the phrase ‘Expository Preaching’ properly covers *all* preaching.” And Miller, 26-27, specifies “a sermon may be life-situational, doctrinal, evangelistic, or ethical, and still be expository if its approach to the subject is rooted in the Scriptures, and it throws true biblical light on the contemporary scene.” I suppose that Miller’s emphasis on exposition as

“laying open” could be taken as having some of the same limitations as “explaining.” But his Chapter VI, 112-141, on choosing the target or purpose of a sermon is surely agreeable with a structural or performative approach to text and sermon. Further, it seems to me that while Miller’s discussion in Chapter III, 53-75, of determining the content or theme of a sermon based on a scriptural text, is mainly oriented syntactically toward meaning rather than function, and sometimes calls to mind the process that Buttrick 1994, 80, calls distillation of a subject or theme out of a text, Miller’s discussion of determining the theme or content also lends itself at some points to a structural or performative approach to texts and sermons. And in Chapter V “Building the Structure: Development,” Miller insists, 96, that the divisions of a sermon should be divisions of the theme that reflects the theme of the passage of scripture. Therefore, if the structuralists are correct in their assertion that words are performative, then Miller’s approach surely tends toward the development of sermons that are structured to do for or to the hearers something that corresponds to what the text was structured to do to or for its original audience or readers. Just as some have suggested that P. T. Forsythe, 1848-1921, anticipated the theology of Karl Barth, 1886-1968, and the Biblical Theology movement, I suggest that Donald G. Miller, anticipates, in some measure, aspects of the structuralist or performative or functional features of the “newer,” late 20th – early 21st centuries, homiletic theology. When Miller states, 98, that the sermon’s structural elements need not slavishly follow the same order as seen in the passage of scripture, it seems that he is considering structure in a dynamic or functional way rather than as a static or fixed edifice.

[¶31] Langer 1993, 221, has a similar use of the word exposition in reference to classical music performance (referenced more fully in Chapter V [¶6]). And it is not only preaching that should display the message rather than merely explain the words of a text. Hermeneutics itself is

defined by Ricoeur 1975, 34, as the task of *displaying* (emphasis added) the kind of “world” projected by a certain type of text (also cited in Chapter III [¶14]). Farley 1996, 168-170, discusses “world of the gospel” and Luke Timothy Johnson 1999, 11-14, discusses “the making of symbolic worlds.” At the same time, Ricoeur 1975, 35, acknowledges that some amount of explanation is a necessary partner of proclamation: “*Kerygma* and *hermeneia* (proclamation and interpretation) go hand in hand.” Langer 1993 (first published 1942) discusses the symbolic world of art, music language, sacrament, ritual, and myth in presenting her “new key” or “symbolic transformation” in philosophy, but she avers, 10-17, that Christian theology, like classical philosophy, had exhausted its generative ideas of sin and salvation and was thus missing out on the philosophical revolution or revelation that she presents and had retreated from the universities to the seminaries.

[¶32] Scholes’ 1974, 143, brief review of Tzvetan Todorov’s *Theory of Reading* may have some relevance here: reminding us of three traditional approaches to reading a text, which he names *projective*, *commentary*, and *poetics*. I think I see a rough parallel here: Using a text or texts to extract and preach on a current theme or topic is sort of like *projection*. Heavily exegetical preaching is *commentary*. And using a text to set forth its message for the current audience is sort of like a *poetics* reading. Since each of these approaches involves beginning with a text, all three are generally lumped under the category of exposition. But the one that I find most pertinent to effective preaching is *poetics*. Scholes writes “Poetics should not be confused with a desire to see in particular works mere instances of some general law. The poetic study of any particular work should lead to conclusions which complete or modify the initial premises of the study. A mere hunt for archetypes or any preestablished structural pattern is not an exercise in poetics but a parody of it.” Scholes, 144-146, reviews Todorov’s definition of *reading* a particular text as

distinguished from *interpreting* or *describing* a text. This can provide a clue to the work of preparing an expository sermon in a poetics vein, especially in Todorov's, 146, procedures of reading, which he calls superposition and figuration. Such reading of a text involves discerning the system of a text and how it relates to other texts. And, as Scholes writes, 144, "...one who aims at discerning the system of a work must give up hope of being literally faithful to the text. He must emphasize some features at the expense of others. And, of course, to the extent that he finds the system he will be treating not the uniqueness of a text but its similarities to others. Yet, Scholes, 146-147, like Ricoeur, acknowledges that these different approaches to a text are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated. Sometimes explication of a text in isolation is necessary to understand its meaning in relation to the larger system of which it is a part, and vice versa. It is unfortunate that the word exposition is sometimes used to refer to explanatory discussion as part of the narration or dialogue of a story or drama, frequently mentioned as "too much exposition"—explanations for the enlightenment of the audience or readers but unnecessary to the story line or inappropriate for the characters in dialogue. That, I think, is what the critics of television drama refer to when they say "too much exposition," a fault that is common but to some extent necessary in the hurried world of writing for one hour police procedural programs. I cite cautions against explaining the stories and other examples used in sermons above [¶ 26] and below [¶ 67]. And it is felicitous that Alter 1981, 184, uses the words discourse and disquisition rather than exposition when he writes of a narrator addressing the reader about the persons and events in the story. The drama or story itself, with its action and dialogue, is an exposition—in the sense of an exhibit not an explanation!

[¶33] **Several serious preachers and homiletic theologians have long been seeking a middle way between two misguided extremes of scriptural**

preaching.

So, what are the possibilities for expository preaching that falls somewhere between the above mentioned two extremes, i.e., using the scripture text as a springboard for a topical or thematic sermon and preaching a running exegetical commentary on the scripture text? Many attempts have been made to find a middle way, including that of Gisbert Bonnet in 18th century Holland who devoted the first part of the sermon to explanation of the text, the second part to expounding on the topic derived from the text, and the third part to applying text and topic to the spiritual needs and situation of the people, as reported by Dargan 1912, 280-281. A much more integrated approach is taken by Haddon Robinson 2001, yet it is still heavily focused around the *explanation* of scripture texts. Old 2010, 663, sometimes refers to this explanation-based preaching as “classical” or “pure” expository preaching, and he found commendable examples of it in some of the young preachers of Asia, especially in South Korea, in the early 21st century. As mentioned above and in Chapter II, Buttrick 1987 has addressed this question and eschews the expressions expository preaching and biblical preaching and rather writes of preaching from scripture in his positive guidance. Donald G. Miller 1957, 26, in a passage also quoted by Edwards 2004, 683, and which I quote here and reference again below [¶ 46], gives a definition of expository preaching that is much broader than, and less constricted by, the compulsion to explain the text to the hearers:

Expository preaching is an act wherein the living truth of some portion of Holy Scripture, understood in the light of solid exegetical and historical study and made a living reality to the preacher by the Holy Spirit, comes alive to the hearer as he is confronted by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in judgment and redemption.

A somewhat similar definition is given by Haddon Robinson 2001, 21. Stott 1982, 125-126, also has an agreeable broadening of the definition of expository preaching. However broad one’s

definition of preaching and of expository preaching in particular two determinants must be active according to Alec Motyer as cited by Keller 2015, 21: responsibility to the truth and responsibility to the present congregation. When contemporary homiletics (around the turn of the 21st century) eschew the term expository and speak rather of biblical preaching or preaching from scripture or preaching biblically I think they mean preaching that occupies some place on the middle ground between the two extremes discussed above. I think they mean preaching that is shaped by both the structure and meaning of a passage of scripture and that is cast in terms of contemporary language and concerns. If this is close to what they mean by preaching biblically, then I am close to being in complete agreement with them. And so, I will stipulate that when I speak of expository preaching, I mean exactly what the contemporary homiletics mean by preaching from scripture, and I join them in rejecting the bogus claim of expository preaching that is represented in the first extreme (topic or theme distilled from a text) and the caricature of expository preaching that is represented in the second extreme (pedantic verse by verse, word by word exegesis).

[¶34] **Guidance is available for developing sermons that use both the content and the form of a scripture text to develop a sermon with its own content and form integrated in such a way that it is intended to do something with the congregation that is parallel or similar to what the text was intended to do with the first hearers of the text.**

It is possible to do something called expository preaching in a way that is faithful to the gospel by addressing it to the world as it is today. This requires that the expository sermon do two things. First, it must at some place set forth some significant aspect of the message that is part of the burden and thrust of a passage of Scripture that is used to guide the development of the sermon. And second, the sermon must be structured and presented in a way that can communicate good

news and connect with the people who gather to hear the word and should address some matter of importance in their life and world. A similar two-headed definition is given by Skudlarek, principal writer of “The Preacher” in Hoffman 1991, 352-356. The first part, set forth at some place something of the burden and thrust of the text, requires that the preacher work with the text over a long enough period and with sufficient exegetical helps to be clear as to what it is about in the original setting and not just what it sort of reminds one of in the present environment. Bonhoeffer 1975, 147, states that “Every text has a center whether I present the text thematically or as a homily.” A homily in his usage of the term here is mainly a verse-by-verse commentary. And he insists that the central concept contained in the text must be recognized in the sermon either explicitly or implicitly. Von Allmen 1962, 53-54, asserts that the sermon should be built on the main point or principal scope of the text and not by the rules of rhetoric. The second part, form and present relevance of presentation, requires that the preacher have some working model or models in mind as to possible ways of building a message that can connect and communicate with people about matters of present importance. At the time of this writing, some of the most promising models or homiletic strategies are those that take their cue from some aspect of the styles, structures, and intentions that are found in the Scriptures themselves. This could mean in some cases that the sermon will have a literary structure and style similar to that of the scripture text. Deiss 1976, 295, indicates that the basis of the literary form of a particular sermon is that of the biblical text which provides the “linguistic architecture” that influences the construction of the homily. He credits H. Cazelles for the expression linguistic architecture. Massey 1980, 54-55, has this advice among his guidelines for designing a textual/expository sermon: “*Whenever possible, let the textual passage determine your outline and tone of treatment.*” And he discusses several forms of writing that are found in scriptural texts and that may be emulated in a sermon on such a

text: *Story* (discussed in an earlier chapter), *Statements* (indicative mood), *Expressions* (of emotion/feeling), and *Prescriptives* (imperative mood). Massey gives scriptural examples of each of these forms. Craddock 2011, 41-51, indicates that if preachers would pay close attention to the careful use of various story forms in the Bible and the particular form of the text at hand and would exercise similar care in the formation of their sermons, then there would be no need to import extraneous stories to spice up their sermons. Long 1989 shows how a literary analysis of the scripture text can sometimes reveal several possible rhetorical or homiletic strategies for a sermon from which the preacher may choose the most promising one for the present situation. He has separate sections on preaching from Psalms, Proverbs, Narratives, Parables of Jesus, and Epistles. And, in a chapter on Sermon Notes, he gives some possible paths for moving from a selected feature of the text to a sermon. Charles Rice 1980, 71, provides an example of this approach by allowing a scriptural parable to evoke a contemporary parable. These contemporary approaches of paying attention to the possibilities of imaginative form and use of narrative suggested by the form of the scripture text are not entirely new, as indicated in Fant and Pinson's 1995, VIII, 190-196, report of the use of imagery and narrative style in the preaching of F. W. Boreham (1871-1959).

[¶35] But, more generally and more importantly, Long 2005, 118, observes that “Instead of thinking of sermon form and content as separate realities, it is far more accurate to speak of the *form of the content*.” And I would add, in view of the citations that follow here, that we may also speak of the inverse: the *content or significance of the form*. Lischer 2001, 51-54, discusses the performative and permanent character of spoken words in Semitic culture (Isaac could not take back the blessing mistakenly pronounced on Jacob), and in Christian teaching on the Word of God as rooted in God's creation by speaking and the Word of God becoming human in Christ,

and he cites Bultmann to the effect that Jesus' works are his words and his words are his works. Someone has well stated the matter something like this: Using the literary form of the scripture text as a guide for developing a sermon means that the sermon may be structured or designed to do for the congregation in the here-and-now something similar or parallel to what the scripture text was designed or structured to do for its original audience or addressees in the there-and-then. Wilson 2007, 257, citing Gerhard O. Forde, affirms that the preacher who would proclaim the gospel directly as God's spokesperson, i.e., prophet, may do to/for the congregation "what the text authorizes." Or, as Buttrick 1987, 273-274, puts it, one may develop a sermon with a hermeneutic of original intention and doing rather than original meaning. And, as Buttrick stated the matter earlier in an article "Interpretation and Preaching" published in *Interpretation* Vol. 35 (January 1981) paraphrased in Lowry 1997, 26, "...our reading of the biblical text should focus not so much on what it *says*, but on the question 'what is the passage trying to *do*?' " Barth 1991, 102-110, in a subsection headed "The Way of Witness," does not use the terminology of structure and performance, but this section comes close to being a "how to" of structuring a sermon to do with the congregation in the here and now what the text was structured to do with the first readers/hearers in the there and then: he says that the sermon should echo the witness of the text but not the monument of the text, that is, not the piety of the prophet or apostle, and not the situation in life, culture language, and history of the text and its first readers/hearers. Rather, 109, "The task is this—to repeat in our own terms for our own people what is there in the text." That is how Barth would have the preacher avoid assigning a theme to a text and avoid shackling the sermon with exegetical factoids, and would have the preacher vary her homiletic strategy or sermon structure or narrative flow from text to text. Johnson 1999, 161, in his discussion of the Gospel of Mark, explains how and why an understanding of the literary structure of a text can be

so essential to understanding its significance. Craddock 2010, 177-178, discusses the dynamics of selecting or designing the form and intention of the sermon in view of the form and setting and intention of the text. This will often require that the life situation of the text be related by the preacher to the life situation of the hearers, a task that Willimon 1981, 18, lists as a key element of pastoral preaching. Alter 1981, 100, comments in his discussion of the calculated use of repetition and variation in 1 Kings 1—Adonijah, David, Nathan, and Bathsheba—“here as elsewhere in the Bible, language manifestly makes things happen.” Craddock 2010, 28, promises to give minimal attention to traditional categories or types of preaching from scripture and maximum attention to whether the sermon says and does what the text says and does; and he discusses at some length, 121-124, the process in sermon preparation of discerning and clarifying what it is that the preacher hears the scripture text saying and doing, that is, what it was saying and doing to or for its original audience. And he notes the functional importance of having the form of the text reflected in the form of the sermon. But he also discusses, 136-150, the approach of interpreting a text in preaching according to its original intention as one way among several and notes that in some cases it may be impossible to identify what the text was originally intended to do, while some of the other approaches to interpretation in preaching—direct, allegorical, typological, thematic, translation—may be ready and available. And, of course, he identifies some of the possibilities and limitations and hazards of these approaches to interpretation in preaching.

[¶36] Long 2005, 134-135, gives a summary review and critique, citing Richard Lischer, of several major currents in contemporary, turn of the 21st century, homiletic thinking (Lowry, Craddock, Wilson, Buttrick) and makes clear that a preacher must have at hand an array of possible homiletic strategies so as to choose one or a combination of more than one, or devise one, that best fits the text and the preaching situation, rather than simply get locked into the

strategy of today or yesterday. Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 22, report that Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) acknowledged the recurrence of three main types of sermon structuring in his preaching: BOX, points enumerated one by one as boards added in building a wooden box; TREE, main points developed out of the “big truth” as branches out of a tree trunk; and RIVER, sermon moves along as one great theme like a river flows between its banks (also cited in Chapter V [¶ 40]). Massey 1980, 24-30, describes major currents in the newer homiletics under the headings of communication science, worship context, community shaping, narrativity, and design. Then in subsequent chapters he discusses the work of sermon design under the headings of more traditional categories: “The Narrative/Story Sermon,” “The Textural/Expository Sermon,” and “The Doctrinal/Topical Sermon.” Thus, for Massey, the older homiletics and the newer homiletics allow, or perhaps require, a great deal of practical overlapping and perhaps alternation with each other in the preacher’s sermon workshop, which Massey, 24, surely suggests in his introduction to the concerns of the newer homiletics with his illustrative reference to Wagner’s appreciative comment upon hearing the Brahms variations and fugue on a theme of Handel, which I quote below [¶ 47]. Ronald Allen 1998, 177-205, gives brief descriptions of over 14 different patterns for the movement of the sermon, along with the possible usefulness of each in maintaining the integrity of sermon form and content. The sermonic approaches surveyed by Allen in that section include the principal trends in the great flurry of new homiletic teaching and writing during the late 20th century, and some of the older approaches as well. Lowry 1997, 15, characterizes the contributions of 10 seminal discussants in the late 20th century “new homiletic” in terms of each contributor’s “envisioning metaphor” for what the sermon is like, beginning with Davis—*tree*—and concluding with himself—*plot*. And, 28, he observes that all of those contributors to a new homiletic have in common that they refuse to announce a sermon

conclusion in advance—all “keep the cat in the bag.” And, in Chapter 4 on *Shape and Strategy*, he, 57-61, characterizes 6 sermon types in the new homiletic: *narrative*, *episodal*, *story*, *transconscious African American*, *phenomenological move*, and *inductive*. And he, 62-89, spells out how the common *shape* of suspension among the various exponents of the new homiletic plays out in their different strategies of the sequencing or plotting that leads to the revelation or disclosure of the preacher’s intention or the resolution of the conflict or question generated in the plotted unfolding of the story. Amazingly, Lowry discovers another commonality in these six different ways of characterizing the strategy of sequencing or unfolding in sermons: they all seem to reflect the elements outlined in his head-turning 1980 book *The Homiletical Plot*: conflict, complication, sudden shift, unfolding. And, 74-84, he explores some of the nuances of degree and timing for the sudden shift in various plotted sermons, depending on text, context, and content, noting similarities and differences with respect to Jesus’ parables of reversal. And he explains, 78, that for the homiletical plot the sudden shift is often not a 180° reversal but is a noticeable redirection which he compares to something in a musical ballad wherein “after a shift of key, of melodic line, and a verse motif, the music restates the theme another time—a theme transformed by the route it has just traveled. Buttrick often mentions, in various lectures, remarks, and publications, that words are performative, not just meaning but doing, acting upon readers or hearers or other texts. And, 1987, 333-445, he specifically articulates the performative perspective of the newer homiletics in his sections on preaching from narrative texts in the “mode of immediacy,” preaching from discursive texts in a “reflective mode,” and preaching from life situations in a “mode of praxis.” Willimon 2005, 33-35, observes that Scripture is formative and aims not just to rehearse what God has done but to prompt the reader or hearer to be or do something in particular. He presents the God-given sketch of Moses’ message in Exodus

19:3-6 as an example of rehearsal leading into exhortation.

[¶37] Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 303, report that the preaching ability of Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) derived in part from his early recognition of the importance of maintaining a unity of theme and objective in the preacher's mind and thus in the sermon which Beecher ordinarily preached extemporaneously. They also report, 1995, VII, 182, that Charles R. Brown (1862-1950) "said that the expository preacher should organize his material to attain a sense of unity and progress. That way he aimed at a definite goal and arrived at it." And they note that Brown believed such unified and targeted sermons could best be developed in "the systematic exposition of some book in the Bible for weeks or months together." Brooks (1835-1893) 1989, 92-93, insists that sermons must be developed with an intention to persuade and move the souls of the hearers rather than with an intention to produce a beautiful work of art, an indication that the best of the older homiletics was not very far from the newer performative homiletics. Developing a sermon that is structured to do something does not require that the preacher master all of the subtleties and developments in literary structuralism. Ricoeur 1975, 65-67, notes that a purely structuralist literary approach to a text might tend to be satisfied once one has identified the structure, form, or "code" of the genre which the text embodies, whereas the work of interpretation should also identify and set forth the discourse, message, or function that is the unique intention of the particular text. Thus, Ricoeur, 68-69, explains that while a structuralist approach to dealing with an object or production of discourse such as a poem or a narrative, whether written or spoken, may be necessary, a structuralist ideology is neither necessary nor sufficient (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 31]). I take structuralist ideology as referring to the position that there is nothing to be discerned in a text except its literary structure, that is, its form, genre, type, formula, or code. James Sanders 1984, 7, was apparently referring to such ideologues of the

school of structural semiotics, of which Ricoeur was a member but not an ideologically extreme one, when he observed that the structuralists had “built a kind of ethos of denigration of traditional biblical scholarship.” Sanders goes on, 7-8, to discuss the ideological or imperious tone that he sees in other twentieth century currents in the literary interpretation of texts—symbolic, political, functional, narrative (and performative?). And Ricoeur 1975, 70, sums up the task of hermeneutics as “to use the dialectics of discourse and work, or performance and competence, as a mediation at the service not of the code but of the message,” so that, 73, hermeneutics (and, I would add, the development of a homiletic strategy or sermon sketch) begins where structural analysis leaves off, i.e., “What is the last level for structural analysis is the threshold of hermeneutics, because the same function which ‘closes’ the narrative ‘opens’ it toward the world, namely toward a situation and a human experience which receive a new power of interpretation from the *mimetic* dimension of the narrative.” The word *mimetic* alludes to the notion that stories mimic, imitate, depict, organize, focus on or clarify some aspect of life experience.

[¶38] **Philosophers, literary critics, and homiletic theologians discuss the implications of the development of modern hermeneutics in relation to the use of structural literary analysis and in relation to the traditional use of classical rhetoric and in relation to the interpreter’s philosophical stance in the development and structuring of biblically based sermons.**

Allen and Springsted 2007, 203-207, provide an overview of hermeneutics as a philosophical development in the 19th and 20th centuries beginning with the work of Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Husserl (1859-1938), and Dilthey (1833-1911) and culminating in Bultmann (1884-1976), Gadamer (1900-2002), and Ricoeur (1913-2005). Dilthey in particular, 203, is credited with developing the concept that the methods of natural science in which every effort is made to

keep subject and object separate and distinct, are not suited to the study of human history, including the interpretation of texts, since it is only possible to understand history, the stream of human life, from the perspective of experience, that is, being a participant in the thing studied: “History is understood only *through* ourselves. In addition, we understand ourselves through history.” This is sometimes called the hermeneutical circle. “We enlarge our own present experience through our understanding of the past.” The paragraph that ends with that statement began with “The discipline of hermeneutics—or the problems and principles of interpretation—has its roots in the rise of historical consciousness.” Massey 1974, 53-54, introduces his chapter on the preacher’s work in sermon preparation in several paragraphs, with citations of Rudolph Bohren and Roger Hazelton, that make clear, with a citation of James M. Robinson, the multiple aspects of hermeneutics, and how the aspect of hermeneutical interpretation that involves the interpreter’s internal or subjective response to the text is essential to sermon development (thus the inevitable hermeneutic circle). Mitchell 1990, 17-18, indicates that effective communication in Black preaching includes the embrace of Black folk culture and language as it is at the preacher’s particular time and place, along with the preacher’s use of his or her professional interpretive skills. That is an example of the existential reality of an aspect of the newer or postmodern hermeneutics, that is, the inseparability of objective and subjective approaches in interpreting texts. Yet, Mitchell, 18-19, goes on to acknowledge, citing Gerhardt Ebeling and John Dillenberger, the necessity in postmodern hermeneutics for the preacher to translate from the historical/cultural milieu of the text to that of the preacher and the congregation.

[¶39] Massey 1974, 67, shifts from contemporary hermeneutics to classical rhetoric to introduce his chapter on the preacher’s homiletical work of developing his or her interpretation of the text into a sermon. He begins with a brief summary of how Christian preaching has been

shaped through many centuries by a pairing of the content of the faith with the communication principles of classical rhetoric. Brilioth 1965 b, 49-55, discusses some of the basic principles of classical rhetoric that have influenced Christian preaching stemming from the work of Cicero that influenced Augustine who was a rhetorician and a Christian theologian, seen by Brilioth, 49, as being a dialectic relation with his rhetorician's discipline as applied to Christian preaching: "he consciously sought to emancipate the churchly proclamation from the techniques of profane oratory and at the same time he continued to be a rhetorician and contributed to the continued influence of ancient rhetoric on the history of preaching." Wilson 2007, 33, has a passage, citing David James Randolph 1969, about the new hermeneutics leading into the new homiletics and its focus on what the sermon does rather than what the sermon says, including a citation of John Wesley that illustrates the continuing influence of ancient rhetoric on preaching. Notice the rhythm of Wesley's statement of the purpose of the preacher—"To invite. To convince. To offer Christ. To build up"—compared to the rhythm of Cicero's statement of the task of the speaker, seen in Brilioth 1965 b, 51—"docere ('teach'), delectare ('delight'), and flectere ('influence'), in order to be able to appeal to intellect, feeling, and will." And Wilson, 2007, 209-226, in a chapter on "Composing to Persuade," dives more deeply into the uses of the concepts and strategies of classical philosophy and rhetoric in preaching, noting first, 209, the three ways of persuading according to ancient teachers:

- reasons of *logos* or logical appeal of arguments and facts
- reasons of *ethos* or ethical appeal (that is, character and integrity) of the speaker
- reasons of *pathos* or emotional appeal

And he urges, 211 shaded area: "In composing your sermon, learn to vary your primary means of persuasion such that what you say at times appeals to logic, to ethos (fostering relationships), to

emotion.” And, beginning with that rhetorical foundation, Wilson goes on in the chapter to discuss the biblical and theological basis of having persuasiveness as a goal in preaching, and some of the strategies for making sermons persuasive whether, 220-221, linear-thinking sermons (point-form, divisional, convergent, including but not limited to deductive/propositional) or polar-thinking sermons (digressive, associational form, including but not limited to inductive/narrative). Wilson indicates that some preachers and some congregants are dominant linear or left-brain thinkers, and some are dominant polar or right-brain thinkers, and he suggests that preachers should cultivate their non-dominant side for the sake of broadening their communication appeal and persuasiveness. Thus deductive/linear sermon forms (D/C – direct current, to use another metaphor) can be improved by incorporating elements of inductive/polar sermon forms (A/C – alternating current), and vice-versa.

[¶40] Bultmann’s 1958 presentation of his demythologizing approach to biblical hermeneutics owns and explains, in Chapter IV, the fact that he is working from the perspective of existentialist philosophy in modern biblical interpretation, and he explains that every exegetical or hermeneutic approach in history is based on some philosophical framework which, ordinarily, is a cultural inheritance of the exegete. And he concludes, 55, “It follows, then, that historical and exegetical study should not be practiced without reflection and without giving an account of the conceptions which guide the exegesis.”³ And, 56-57, he presents his view of why and how it is that existentialist philosophy is an appropriate stance and framework for interpreting the Bible, and how existentialist philosophy helps to make a person open to the word of the Bible as a way of owning, understanding, and taking responsibility for one’s own personal existence. Bultmann, 57, does not think that a person must be an existentialist philosopher or even have a grasp of philosophical categories in order to embrace the Christian faith, but he does

indicate that one must make the decision to accept the fact of one's own existence: "without this decision, without the readiness to be a human being—a person who takes it upon himself to *be*—no one can understand a single word of the Bible as speaking to his own existence." Embracing the reality of one's own existence is, of course, an existentialist notion. Bultmann also states: "Scientific interpretation of the Bible does require the existentialist conception *in order to explain the biblical understanding of human existence*" (emphasis added).

[¶41] Alter 1981, especially 2, 15, 40, takes a dim view of a tendency of some scripture scholars to focus on the structure and narrative devices of texts to the neglect of the deeper meaning and message of biblical passages. Scholes 1974, 8-9, also discusses problems of making a strict division of labor and genres between structuralist criticism and hermeneutic criticism, and the complementary relationship of the two approaches. Just as, according to Scholes, a critic should produce something beyond and other and more subjective than the hermeneutic recovery of meaning in a text, as important and useful as that recovery or re-presentation may be, so should a preacher, according to me. It seems that a similar conclusion is reached from the perspective of a postmodernist approach to moral philosophy which acknowledges the unavoidable or required influence of the transmission and redaction history of the text and the subjective cultural experience and history of the interpreter upon the interpretation of a text, as reflected in the following portion of a quotation of Gadamer 1986, 275, in Allen and Springsted 2007, 246: "...a religious proclamation is not there to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in a way in which it exercises its saving effect. This includes the fact that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly, i.e., according to the claims it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application." I think that Barth, who has come under

much homiletic criticism for dismissing sermon introductions, illustrations, conclusions, and rhetorical structuring and for insisting that the lines of the sermon should simply follow the lines of the text, reflects something like Gadamer's conjoining of understanding and application in the present context of interpreter and reader when he (Barth) writes, 1991, 122-129, that the "address" of the sermon, the "application" of the sermon, the "so what" for you and me in the here and now, should be incorporated all along the way in the preacher's use of language rather than attached at the end as a separate unit. Barth, 127-128, recommends "in principle that no statement should be made that is either explication alone or application alone. We should not play the role of the exegete who never deviates from the text. We should never lecture on the text but simply say what is there. This continuous sharpshooting means work. No explication, then without application, or vice versa!" Massey 1980, 56-60, has, it seems to me, incorporated Barth's dictum of combining exegesis/explication with exposition/application in every sentence or utterance of the sermon, without at the same time dismissing the work of using various structuring schemes and elements such as narrative approaches and point-form outlines with introductions, conclusions, and illustrations. This is indicated in Massey's discussion and examples under the heading of his fourth guideline for designing the textual/expository sermon: "4. *Sermonize the message with your eye always upon how it is to apply to human interest and experience.*" Mitchell 1990, 116, notes that "In many Black churches the pastor is so well known and respected that the sermons tend to start instantly." Thus, "the non-introduction introduction." While Barth's dismissal or exclusion of structuring sermons with introductions, divisions, illustrations, and conclusions seems severe and extreme, it should be clear from his approach to "Actual Preparation of the Sermon," 1991, 91-129, that the preacher who conscientiously does his or her own work of wrestling with a text and finding one's own connections between the text

and the present world and preaching situation, and finding one's own words for communicating those connections will be able to proclaim good news with or without introductions, illustrations, divisions, and conclusions. Such present, personal, and contextual perspectives clearly eliminate any legitimacy to the practice of preaching from someone else's sermon outline or manuscript and even the practice of preaching from one's own file of previous messages without some serious renovation, updating and recasting.

[¶42] Mohr and Mohr 1982, 102-106, discuss the use of structural narrative analysis in biblical and theological studies from the perspective of specialists in literary criticism. I think I see a complementary use of structural analysis and hermeneutic criticism in Craddock's 2011, 108, suggestion that Jesus' use of parables communicates God's incarnation and immanence and his use of hyperbole communicates God's transcendence. That is, as Funk 1982 said that a parable is a "linguistic incarnation," Craddock suggests that a hyperbole is a "linguistic transcendence," for example, Mark 10:25-27:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.

It is almost as if Jesus had said "Don't go looking for a narrow passage through a rock formation nicknamed "eye-of-needle" and just wide enough for a very skinny camel to squeeze through; that would sabotage my hyperbolic image meant to point to God's transcendence. If such a passage through a rock formation with such a nickname can be pointed to, it probably acquired that nickname long after Jesus' time as a way of "explaining" and thus abusing, obfuscating, sabotaging, and destroying his astounding hyperbole. James Sanders 1984, 46-47, begins his discussion of "Canonical Hermeneutics" by noting that the supposed mutual contradictions of "contra-positive" hyperboles in the Bible can be seen as part of the Bible's self-correcting feature

when those hyperboles are understood in relation to both the communal and the textual contexts in which and to which the differing hyperbolic texts speak; and he gives some examples of such counter-positive hyperboles. The term counter-positive is used in reference to hyperboles that seem to contradict each other but are not intended that way and may not be taken that way when fully understood in context. The expression self-correcting is an aspect of what Sanders and others sometimes refer to as the Bible's pluralism. A familiar negative assessment of the same feature: The Bible is self-contradictory or can be used to support contrary positions on just about any issue. Wilson 2007, 218, notes that "Being persuasive does not mean trying to answer all the questions listeners may have." Acknowledging mystery, paradox, ambiguity, not knowing, and apparent contradiction in Christian teaching is very important and can itself be more persuasive to listeners than trying to explain everything or answer every question. And Wilson, 218-219 has a list of 22 central tenets of Christian faith that may sound contradictory to seekers and believers alike. And he shares the following statement made by Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) when talking about the fact that language itself is metaphoric or symbolic: "Accordingly, we never come so near to a truly well-rounded view of any truth, as when it is offered paradoxically, that is, under contradictions." Careful literary historical attention to Jesus' words and implied meanings could have prevented some very bad "scientific explanations." A similar misguided scholarly attempt has been made by hypothesizing a natural history explanation of the source of the plagues on Egypt in Exodus, according to Borg 2001, 97, wherein the explainers missed the point of the supernatural implication of the story: *God did this*. Borg asserts that it is crucial for modern/postmodern minds to discern when to interpret texts historically and when metaphorically and when both historically and metaphorically.

[¶43] Structural analysis can point the way to a hermeneutic that is more integral to the

setting, form, and performative intention of the text that one is to interpret in preaching. A preacher can be greatly helped by using the elements of homiletic analysis or structuring design that are outlined in Buttrick 1987, 306-307. I discuss my own use of this scheme in Chapter V. Buttrick refers to the first item, analysis of the passage as a plot, as a “semi-structural analysis.” And he occasionally, in his seminar lectures, joins the second item, analysis of literary design, with plot and refers to the two as structural analysis. The structural or performative approach to the text and to the sermon design can help to overcome one of the pervasive weaknesses of some preaching that is heavy on exegetical detail: the lack of a strong sermon ending or conclusion even when the preachers agreed with Blackwood 1946, 126, that “the conclusion embodies the purpose of the sermon, thus moving the will of the hearer to the desired action.” Ronald Allen 1968, 169-176, thinks the word conclusion does not fit when the sermon is viewed as conversation. He suggests that preachers try to decide on the sermon ending while developing the overall pattern of sermon content and movement, and doing so with a view toward engaging the congregation in a sermonic “conversation” that will continue after the preacher stops talking. On the other hand, if one thinks the sermon should be structured performatively, it can be hard to make the conclusion performative when the body of the sermon has treated the text as thematic, that is, having a meaning but not a function. For example, Davis’s 1958, 192-200, discussion of sermon conclusions asserts their importance but gives example varieties of conclusions that seem rather weak and formulaic capstones: prayers, blessings, ascriptions. Lowry 1997, 85-89, discusses the ending (dénouement) of a plotted sermon as an *Unfolding* view of a future that is unavoidably changed by the indicative good news that has been disclosed at some point in the resolution of the narrative *Conflict*, 62-66, or *Complication*, 66-74, of the sermon, that is, in the preceding part of the sermon that Lowry, 74-85, discusses as the *Sudden Shift*. And he, 87,

cautions that “The most likely temptation for the preacher here is the temptation to say *too* much about this result of the

gospel’s intersection with human life.”

[¶44] **The Black preaching tradition of concluding the sermon on a rising note of celebration is consistent with major currents in the wider world of homiletic and liturgical theology near the turn of the 21st century and may well be emulated by preachers and congregations/parishes of “non-Black” cultural backgrounds, histories and settings.**

Mitchell 1990, 119-122, discusses the tradition in Black preaching of ending the sermon on a rising note of celebration. He emphasizes that this pattern should not be forced or seem perfunctory or ritualized but should flow both logically and organically from what has been proclaimed in the body of the sermon. That logical and organic progression has also been described by Lowry 1997, 24-25, under the heading *The Transconscious African American Sermon*, citing Mitchell 1977 and others, as a narrative/emotional progression in the sermon’s build-up, the trajectory of which is known to both preacher and congregation. And Lowry 1997, 25, quotes the advice given to preacher and professor Zan Holmes, as reported in McClain 1990, 68:

Start low; go slow,
Go high; strike fire.
Sit down.

Mitchell 1990, 32-34, describes *The Formation of Black Preaching Style* as having developed out of the confluence of some elements of West African culture with European/American preaching traditions—not only the more formal structures but also the more emotional style of the likes of George Whitefield in the First Great Awakening. Such an organic cultural development is not something that could be readily emulated with integrity by preachers who have not grown up in

that cultural environment.

[¶45] But, about the sermon having a narrative/emotional build-up to conclude on a rising note of celebration, the thought occurs to me that if the preacher and the congregation have included in the sermon development the intentional study and thought that Wilson 2007, 11-25, styles “theological exegesis” or “theological criticism” (What is God doing in and behind the text and what related thing is God doing in our world and life today?) followed by a “gospel hermeneutic” (Where is the good news in this text or behind it and in our life and world today?) with “how to” guidance in Chapters 12 and 13, 229-262, then a rising note of celebration would be a coherent culmination of the sermon whether in the Black church cultural context or a context of some other cultural hue or shade. Additional homiletic theologians besides Mitchell and Wilson have discussed the structuring of sermons in ways that support the integrity of ending on a note of celebration. Ritschl 1963, 21, wrote: “A sermon has to be positive... express the gracious will of God in Christ to be in solidarity with sinners... say that God loves those who do not love him.” Barbra Brown Taylor 2001, 157, looks to experience a moment of revelation in her sermon preparation without which the congregation will not likely experience a moment of revelation in the preaching. Lischer 2001, Preface (pages not numbered), suggests that a moment of theological insight is needed during sermon preparation to bring preaching to life. Davis 1958, 37, refers to the preacher’s process of studying a text and amassing one’s notes until a “generative idea” for sermon development emerges. If the preacher hears a Voice during sermon preparation and the congregation hears a Voice in the preaching (Massey 1974, 53, and Long 2005, 47) then surely that preaching may conclude on a rising note of celebration. Lischer 1988, 73-75, in his article “Preaching and the Rhetoric of Promise” discusses preaching as a transaction in which the content of the promise of Christ is not only announced but also bestowed by the power of the personal

trust relationship between preacher and congregation, since, in truth, it is Christ who is promised and who promises. The content of the promise of Christ is not a description of the way things are but of the way things could be in God's care and under God's direction. Lischer, 75, cites Luther to the effect that preaching that is realistic and honest is always Good News—*pro nobis*, for us. And as mentioned just above here, Lowry 1997, 85-89, discusses the end of a sermon as the *Unfolding* a future that is unavoidably changed by the indicative good news that has been disclosed in the sermon. And, in addition to the gospel structuring of the sermon, a culminating note of celebration is also a most appropriate lead-in to the next part of the gospel feast, the *celebration* of the Lord's Supper—the Eucharist—the Thankful Meal, which Willimon 1981, 96-97, calls an ecstatic experience of the eschatological gospel feast! And not only that, but the Lord's Supper also may be followed by a celebration and sharing of good news about upcoming opportunities for action, service, study, and fellowship within the congregational or parish community and in the larger community of God's worldly household aka "announcements." This departing celebration of life and ministry in the weekday world would of course be concluded with the pastor's good word (*bene diction*) of mission and blessing, which might not actually be a conclusion but could rather lead into an informal fellowship period with refreshments or even a light lunch, depending on the geographic/residential profile of the parish/congregation's constituency. Such a multiphase celebration at the end of the worship service could, I would hope, put an end to the detestable practice of treating the good news of opportunities for study, informal fellowship, mutual care, and mission as extraneous "announcements" that should be done and gotten over with and out of the way before the worship service begins in earnest. Mitchell 1990, 131-133, comes back to the theme of joyful celebration in his final chapter "Toward a Theology of Black Preaching" where he explains that the whole worship service should be

uplifting—an experience of the gift of joy in Christian faith, fellowship, mutual care and outreaching service, worship, and preaching.

[¶46] **Due to the performative nature of words, it is important for interpreters to identify the functional intention of scriptural texts and for preachers to be clear about the functional intention of the sermons they develop from scriptural texts.**

Haddon Robinson's 2001, 21, definition of expository preaching reflects the traditional assumption that a preacher should look for a concept or theme in a text rather than the intended function or action of a text. He would avoid making the sermon a mere lecture or head trip by insisting that the text must first be applied to the personality of the preacher by the Holy Spirit, and then it is applied to the hearers by the Holy Spirit through the preacher. A similar perspective is seen in Donald G. Miller's definition of expository preaching quoted above [¶ 33] and in Massey 1980, 53: "A close firsthand study of any text will make its demands upon us, but the rewards are greater. That higher word (God's Word that is in the words of the text and may be in the words of the sermon but is always more than either or both the text and the sermon) grants a message that makes a difference, first in the preacher, then in those who hear what the preacher reports." Surely Robinson, Miller, and Massey are correct in that the present work of God's Word and Spirit in both preacher and hearers is essential to the faith witness of the preaching event; but that conviction should probably not be used to avoid identifying and articulating what it is that the text was structured to do to and for its first readers and what the forthcoming Sunday sermon will be structured by preacher and people to do with them. Massey 1980 seems to be pointing toward that performative intention in the context around the passage quoted above and in the next guideline that he lays down, 54: "2. *Whenever possible let the textual passage determine your outline and tone of treatment.*" And a performative intention is also clear in Haddon Robinson's,

2001, 77-96, application of Davis's 1958, 81, three sermon developmental questions "What Does This Mean? Do I Believe It? What Difference Does It Make?" to the study of a text rather than to a sermon idea, as in Davis's formulation. Robinson's approach would almost seem to accomplish a structural analysis of a text by reversing Ricoeur's dictum cited above ([¶ 37] and Chapter II [¶ 47]) that hermeneutics (interpretation) begins where structural analysis leaves off. And Robinson's, 105-106, discussion of framing a homiletical idea seems well attuned to the performative or structuralist approach to texts. And his discussion of sermon conclusions, 111-112, points to a target of life change in the hearer. Blackwood 1946, 132-136, spells out some definite criteria of what a conclusion should do to and for the hearers. Keller 2015, 214-223, indicates the first two tasks in "Writing an Expository Message:" "Discern the Goal of the Text" and "Choose Your Theme for the Sermon." Notice his implied acknowledgment that a text may support more than one possible theme for a sermon. Donald G. Miller 1957, 112-141, asserts that an expository sermon should not only have the same theme as the text it expounds but should also have the same target or purpose, that is, should aim to accomplish the same or similar change in its audience as the text intends to accomplish in its readers. That requirement could be taken as simply a desirable qualification of the propositional structure of traditional homiletic rhetoric, a structure that has been widely used in the development of many kinds of sermon, whether expository, topical, thematic, doctrinal, catechetical or other. Massey 1980, 18-19, captures the performative perspective most clearly in writing about the "immediate goals for specific sermons;" and he lists several categories of the kinds of tasks that a sermon may be designed to accomplish among particular people in particular circumstances. He rehearses the story in Sangster 1950, 24-25, wherein a theological student anxiously queries the professor about the sermon he (the student) has preached: "It *will* do, Sir, won't it?" "Do *what*?" snapped the teacher.

Barth 1991, 49, 102-104, as mentioned above [¶ 4], rejects the common assumption that a text necessarily has either a theme (*scopus*) or an intention, and his insistence that the lines of a sermon should simply follow the lines of the text might tend more towards a narrative kind of flow, which he calls “the way of witness,” than towards a verse by verse explanation or commentary. Massey 1980, 22, 53, demonstrates a perceptive grasp of the possibility of effective preaching in Barth’s textual approach in the example, 22, of Barth’s sermon “Look Up to Him!” based on Psalm 34:5, and in an important caution, 53, about preaching that simply reiterates the words of a text: “A good expository sermon is not a quotation of the text or passage; it is an exposition of its meaning and import.” As Barth’s 1991, 81-84, discussion of originality makes it clear that the preacher’s “own free human words” in following the lines of the text must be such that application is integral to or woven into explication of the text, and vice-versa. He wrote, 82, “In this regard we are not to think of explication being followed by application.” And as mentioned above [¶ 41] Barth, 127-128, recommends “in principle that no statement should be made that is either explication alone or application alone...No explication, then without application or vice versa!”

[¶47] **Propositional and point-form (thematic/divisional) approaches to sermon development and structuring which were so common in the homiletic teaching and preaching practice of recent centuries can still be effective when used with careful attention to purpose and functional design including clear connections and transitional sentences that help the hearers keep track of the train of thought in the sermon.**

Davis 1958, 145-149, provides a brief description and several good examples of sermons structured to support a thesis or proposition. Haddon Robinson 2001, 116-124, puts the propositional approach in perspective as one of several deductive sermon arrangements along with inductive arrangements. Wilson 2007, 141-142, describes “three key historical precedents”

of modern propositional or point-form preaching: (1) an exegesis-application approach which dates back to the synagogue and possibly the building of the Second Temple—“so they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation” (Nehemiah 8:8); an approach modified in the time of Charlemagne to reading the Latin text, translating it, explaining it, and applying it to the people’s lives; and modified in the Puritan plain style sermon to exposition, doctrine, application; (2) the medieval disputation which consisted of a question followed by argument against and then for the position implied in the question, more commonly known by the later designation as Hegel’s thesis, antithesis, synthesis; (3) the classical syllogism: if A, and B, then C, famously illustrated by the example: all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. And Wilson goes on to discuss important reasons why modern propositional, deductive, or point-form preaching stemming from these historic precedents may still be useful in some textual, doctrinal, and preaching situations. He also discusses some of the historical and cultural reasons why a shift to some of the alternative approaches launched by the new hermeneutics and the new homiletics were due and past due. In a similar vein, Massey 1980, 24, takes note of the enduring value and potential life in the older standard sermon forms before proceeding to suggestions for making better use of them by incorporating insights and approaches from the newer homiletics. And he provides an apposite illustration from his classical music background, which I mentioned above [¶ 36]:

There is much to be said for increased appeal and the need to move beyond the limitations of stilted stereotypes—and I am about to treat some of what is being said and suggested—but when I hear discussions about some sermon form being outmoded I recall something musician Richard Wagner reportedly remarked upon hearing Johannes Brahms play his scintillating Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel. Although Wagner was not especially fond of Brahms, he was so moved by the composer’s genius that he declared, “That shows what may still be done with the old forms provided someone appears who knows how to treat them.”

Allen and Springsted 2007, 32, discuss how Plato’s dialectic differs from Aristotle’s propositional

logic. Langer 1993, 68, defines a proposition as “*a picture of a structure – the structure of a state of affairs,*” emphasis hers, and indicates, 67, that a proposition may have a symbolic mission and thus may be spoken of as a complex symbol. When it comes to structuring a sermon to demonstrate or establish a proposition, there should be a purpose of change in the hearers beyond merely establishing or demonstrating the proposition. Wenig 2001, 189, cites James Forbes who taught her to express a sermonic proposition in the following form: “I propose to show that _____ to the end that _____, e.g., to the end that the congregation will think/feel/do X.” And she reports that Forbes taught his student preachers to test the worthiness of the proposition with the key questions:

- Is the proposition clear?
- Does the proposition excite your interest?
- After hearing the proposition, do you want to hear the sermon?
- Is the proposition urgent?
- What difference will hearing this sermon make?
- Is the proposition true to the text?
- Does the proposition ring true, or sound hollow?
- Does the proposition avoid false advertising, or does it make a promise on which it cannot deliver?

It seems to me that these excellent evaluational queries are similar to the very questions that Barth would ask of every sentence of a sermon that simply follows the rhythm of the text rather than being structured propositionally, which I discuss further below. Thus, it appears that propositional preaching which has come in for so much dismissive comment in recent decades need not be a matter of merely proving an hypothesis as if only to demonstrate the preacher’s skill in logic but can be designed with the intention of effectually evoking a gospel change, or, as Rabbi Wenig would have it, being a performative Torah moment, in the lives of the hearers.

[¶48] Long 2005, 104, cites Ronald Sleeth as one of several contemporary homileticians that have dissented from the newer, more inductive or narrative and aesthetic styles and have

sought to rehabilitate the deductive or propositional approach for the sake of greater clarity and effectiveness in communicating the message of the sermon. Perhaps the “new homiletics,” at its best, does not so much question whether propositional or point-making in sermons may be designed with an intention of effectually evoking a gospel change or being a performative Torah moment in the lives of the hearers as it questions whether the propositional approach can most effectually fulfill such an intention *in the present cultural milieu*. In addition, the newer homiletics should lead the preacher to question whether the propositional, point form, divisional, distillation/extraction, thematic, or doctrinal, or any other homiletic strategy is appropriate for the text at hand in the present preaching situation; and also lead to self-examination as to whether one tends toward employing the same homiletic style or type to deal with every text in any and all preaching situations. Massey’s 1980, 56, list of “four basic ways that sermon exposition can go askew” includes “A third way exposition fails is when the preacher uses the same pattern of progression to deal with very different textual genres.” Genre confusion! On the other hand, Willimon’s 2005, 47-49, summary statement of marks or tendencies of preaching from a commitment to listening to the Bible and to preaching biblically can be very helpful but would fairly eliminate propositional or classic rhetorical approaches altogether. And, 66-88, he suggests that classical rhetoric or propositional preaching never was and never could be adequate to the task of proclaiming the message of cross and resurrection.

[¶49] Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 111, observe that the style of the lecture hall, that is, analysis, argumentation, divisions, crept into preaching following the methods of the schoolmen, that is, scholasticism, in the Middle Ages and that this was a departure from the more artistic and flowing style of the classical orators and the early church preachers. And they go on to suggest ways to use divisions in a sermon so as to enhance communication by making clear the

preacher's train of thought but without turning the sermon into an exercise in logic. If a sermon has a subject, a theme, or simply a scripture passage, it can be informative, edifying and formative; and the sermon can explore the subject from several different perspectives or look at several different facets of it without stating a hypothesis to be proved as in a plane geometry demonstration. And it seems to me that perhaps the most critical and most often neglected or flubbed aspect of using sermon divisions effectively is the matter that Broadus and Weatherspoon treat on pages 119-120: transitions. I have great respect for a certain preacher who is very effective and popular because his sermons are based in thorough exegetical work and because his messages are always illuminated by his gift of telling just the right stories from his own personal history, current experience, or reading and observation. But he has the annoying and distracting practice of signaling transitions from division to division by pausing and calling out the number "two" or "three." The number three always makes me wonder what ever happened to number two. Did I go to sleep? And I lose my focus on what the preacher is saying at that moment. I suspect that calling out the numbers is a mnemonic device for the preacher since he speaks without notes. But he would be a much better communicator if instead of the numbers he used a simple transitional sentence that mentioned the subject matter of the division just ending and the one about to commence. The numbers of the divisions might help the preacher's memory, but only the subject matter of the divisions will help the hearers' comprehension of the speaker's train of thought! Similarly, some preachers may be good at organizing their messages in outline form with headings and subheadings identified in Roman and Arabic numerals, upper and lower case letters in and out of parentheses and brackets, but this will surely hinder rather than help oral communication if one attempts to display such an outline edifice in the preaching. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 151, cite Chrysostom as a good example of helping the audience keep track

of the progress of the sermon by occasional backward and forward glances at the path travelled thus far and the path that lies ahead, a far better way of effective oral communication than announcing subject heads or the numbers of division points. Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 23, citing Linn 1966, 88-89, report that “For the most part Fosdick united the major sections of his sermons with transitional sentences, while his minor divisions were united by transitional phrases.” Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 265, note that:

Buttrick (George) is one of the few preachers who mastered the art of smooth transition. Frequently his illustrations serve as transitions between his major thoughts. He ties together the principal divisions of the sermon by means of statements or stories which refer to a previous truth and point toward the following one:

And they quote this from Buttrick 1931, 157:

A congregation has some right to know where a preacher is traveling. He should at least indicate the mile-stones. But some preachers, instead of indicating the mile-stones, dig a trench across the road (which is a fair description of a long and awkward pause or a clumsy transition), and the poor congregation must scramble out of the trench before it can resume the journey.

In the same volume at pp. 302-303, Fant and Pinson present Paul Sherer (1892-1969) as one who taught the importance of clear and strong sermon structure and as one who practiced what he taught and, paradoxically, as one whose transitions were so smooth “that the bony skeleton of the outline does not show,” which suggests that Sherer’s style of speaking was as much that of smooth narrative flow as that of carefully placing the blocks of a fixed structure. Barth 1991, 126, opposes the division of sermons into parts and favors maintaining the unity of the sermon as a corpus that repeats “the text’s own rhythm,” and while not always following the schematic order of the text or treating every verse or word, will communicate a sense of narrative flow with good transitions using occasional backward and forward looks. And Barth would by all means avoid the separation of exegesis/exposition from application by way of the two-part sermon that was favored by Schleiermacher, and which was also favored by some of the Puritans as in “Plain

Style,” mentioned above [¶ 7]. Craddock 2011, 193, asserts that a clear sense of dynamic movement in the sermon is far more important than any static clarity of structure.” And he suggests a test question: “Does one part anticipate the next part and are the listeners gratified by the sequence?” Long 2005, 187-192, has some helpful suggestions on “making connections” in the flow of the sermon.

[¶50] **Texts and sermons say and mean things as well as intend and do things. Therefore, preachers may use both the tools of hermeneutic interpretation and the strategies of structural performance or intended function in working with texts and developing sermons.**

Concerning Donald G. Miller’s criterion for an expository sermon cited above [¶46], that the sermon should have both the same theme and the same target (performative intention) as the text: perhaps Buttrick and other more recent homileticsians would demur that it is not quite correct to assume that a text has a theme but only that it has a purpose or target, i.e., it intends to do something to or for its readers, not necessarily mean something or discuss something of a universal or translatable concept. Barth 1991, 49, 102-104, as mentioned above, goes even further by suggesting that neither text nor sermon should be thought of as having either a theme or definable subject of discussion (*scopus*) but would rather have the lines of the sermon simply trace the lines of the text. Long 2005, 101, reviews a recent discussion of scripture scholars and homileticsians that challenges the notion of the Bible as a repository of ideas so that one might isolate the main idea of a text and adapt that to a generative idea for a sermon, such as Davis 1958, 21 and *passim*, suggests. Barth 1991, 49, 102-104, is certain that assuming that a text has a theme or subject of discussion will produce topical, subject, or thematic preaching rather than expository preaching in the sense being discussed here. Craddock, 2010, 28, 122-123, on the other hand, discusses scripture texts (and sermons) as intending both to mean and to do. Johnson 1999,

13, in a section of the Introduction headed “Symbolic World and Religious Myth” has a statement that seems to reflect both the distinction between the structural or performative intention of texts and the hermeneutic of interpretive meaning of texts while also implicitly recognizing that there can be no strict or rigid separation between those two approaches, to wit:

“...humans are unstable and instinctually deprived creatures with an insatiable thirst for stability and meaning; the creation of meaning is essential to both stability and survival; meaning is found in the world of symbols shared by a society, from the manner of greeting to its myth of divine creation; inherent in this world of symbols is a process of interpretation.

The final step in Long’s 2005, 70-98, “Brief Exegetical Method for Preaching” is “State the claim of the text upon the hearers (including the preacher).” And in the following chapter, 99-116, he fleshes out this notion of claim in terms of “The Focus and Function of the Sermon.” After a preliminary review of recent discussions, debates, and developments in the field of homiletics, he, 106, cites the work of David Kelsey on the function of Christian Scripture in shaping individual and community identities and concludes that “Biblical texts say things that do things, and the sermon is to say and do those things too,” and that “texts...do things by saying things in certain ways.” And Long 2005, 108-116, proposes that the preacher develop focus and function statements for the sermon being prepared based on what the biblical text intends to say and do. The sermon’s intention will be similar to but not the same as that of the text because the intention of the sermon must also be shaped by the situation and needs of the congregation to which it will be preached. Wilson 2007, 52, makes clear that a theme sentence for a sermon developed with his theological exegesis and gospel hermeneutic approach may point to a message that communicates meaning or one that fosters encounter with God, depending on the preacher’s chosen purpose for the sermon on a particular text for a particular preaching situation. And when he comes, 71-78, to listing examples of transposing the concerns of a text to concerns

of today it seems clear that he takes the texts as both meaning and doing, some pointing more to one and some more to the other. I have cited Ricoeur 1975, 65-73 and Haddon Robinson 2001, 77-96, above [¶ 46] on the matter of structural analysis of texts followed by hermeneutical interpretation of texts.

[¶51] Theologians, liturgiologists, and homileticians in the “Catholic liturgical paradigm” (West), such as Fuller, Sloyan, Skudlarek, and Sobrino often assert that the homily should not just tell the good news but should aim to actualize it in the lives and world of the hearers, especially when accompanied by the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, just as the sacrament is to make the sacrifice of Christ actual in the life of the people, especially when accompanied by the preached word. That perspective is reflected in the discussion of Sobrino’s assessment of the preaching of Archbishop Romero in Old 2010, 268-270, and Old’s, 271-278, review of some of Romero’s sermons. A performative as distinguished from explanatory view of the function of texts and sermons can also be seen in many homiletic theologians of the Protestant liturgical paradigm, such as Buttrick 1987, Craddock 1983, 2002, Lowry 1980, 1992, Don Wardlaw 1983, Jensen 1993, Swank 1981, Long 1989, Long, ed., 1996, Steimle, Niedenthal and Rice, eds., 1980, Troeger 1990, and Haddon Robinson 2001. There are many more that I haven’t read and do not have. Buttrick 1987, 483-486, presents annotated bibliographies of Recent Homiletic Theory and Theology of Preaching. I think all of the various approaches can be helpful. For example, the phenomenological and cultural consciousness formed by biblical symbols approach of Buttrick and the existentialist inductive narrative approach of Craddock can each be used by the same preacher with different texts, depending on the scriptural context and the preaching occasion, or perhaps conflated and both approaches used at the same time. I know that such eclectic alternation or combination is philosophically and literarily permissible because, as

Scholes 1974, 211, has pointed out, Jacques Derrida, “though frequently called a structuralist...is closer to existentialist phenomenology in his outlook;” and I also know such combination is permissible because Allen and Springsted 2007, 223, indicate that “the immediate background of deconstruction was a movement known as structuralism, a reaction to the existential phenomenology of Sartre.” Perhaps Buttrick and Craddock are both existentialist phenomenologists! Further, Scholes’, 168-200, discussion of the structuralist imagination in relation to the vision of an interconnected universe, interconnected biosphere, interconnected humankind, and interconnected literature and language, brings to mind Paul’s observation that “all things work together for good with those who love the Lord” (Romans 8:28). I paraphrase: all serious homiletic approaches can work for improvement in those preachers who want to communicate the gospel. And, concerning the “god” that is loved by secularist Scholes, 182, the all-encompassing “It” of the universe, the immanent but not transcendent secular god of the secular structuralists: I see at least an apparent resemblance between that god and Buttrick’s God-with-us-in-a-being-saved-world and Borg’s 2003, 65-66, *panentheistic* God as the encompassing Spirit in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) rather than the *supernatural theistic* God as an all-powerful autocrat manipulating human events on earth as a kind of heavenly puppeteer. Buttrick and Borg and I, and, we trust, the reader, are not secular structuralists who are willing to use the biblical symbols to speak to biblical people who need to hear the secularist message. Rather, we are disciples of Jesus Christ who are willing to use whatever tools the living God has put in front of us and whatever it takes to communicate God’s love for the people God has given us from the world (John 17:6). It seems to me that phenomenology, deconstruction, demythologization, remythologization, canonical criticism, semiotics, the knowledge and use of symbolic worlds, structuralism, hermeneutics, and perhaps

other textual categories and approaches, have one thing in common: each can be useful in the task of discerning the intended meaning and function of a text in the life of faith communities and in the life of the world – in times past and in the present.

[¶52] **The recent flurry of experimentation in new or recovered and remodeled approaches to sermon development, sermon structures and styles of preaching is part of the necessary, perennial, inevitable, and ongoing process of change, development and adaptation in every kind of human endeavor.**

One may ask why preachers and homiletic theologians of recent decades have got so caught up—enraptured—in exploring the structures and the structuring of texts and of sermon scripts, and why it is important for preachers to keep on considering and experimenting with possible alternative ways of structuring and developing their sermon scripts. Some light is shined on these questions by comments of the Broadway composer and librettist Stephen Sondheim’s response in a 2010 interview with Terry Gross on the National Public Radio program *Fresh Air* which was rebroadcast on the occasion of Sondheim’s death at age 91 in November 2021. Terry wondered if Stephen experienced a connection between his artistry in music and the artistry of jazz musicians. Sondheim’s answer was no, not much, because jazz is an improvisational art and his own approach to composition was thoroughly planned, structured, reworked, and edited based on the metrics and principles of traditional music theory taught by his early mentors. Terry also expressed puzzlement that part of Sondheim’s early education took place when he was a cadet in a military academy. She had trouble picturing the master of Broadway musicals as a cadet in a military uniform. Sondheim pointed out that he was only in the military school for two years at the age of 10 to 12 following his parents’ divorce. But that experience was a lifesaver for him, said Sondheim, because it brought order and structure into his life and his world which had

collapsed and fallen into complete disorder and chaos, which, said Stephen, is what happens to children when their parents split up. Further along, Stephen observed that the world is always in chaos, or, at least, there is always some chaos in life and in the world. And that's why people compose music, produce all kinds of art, structure their days, make plans and commitments—to create some kinds of order in the midst of the chaos. And I note that helping people to restore some order and structure in their disordered lives and chaotic worldview is an important function and value of all religious participation including Christian worship and preaching in particular, by reactualizing the good news of God's love and presence in people's life and world. But every approach to the structure and practice of Christian worship and preaching has its day in the sunshine of being fresh, meaningful, and effectual in helping people to regain some sense of order and goodness in life and in this world of hurt and disorder. But every such approach to the structure and practice of Christian worship and preaching eventually becomes old and staid and stale and less effectual. Thus, the need of our continual attention to renovations and remodelings. No model, approach, strategy, philosophy, or structure is sufficient for all times, all texts, and all environments. The structural or performative approaches of many current homileticians to correcting the problems that have arisen from the extremes of so-called exegetical preaching are an improvement over the expedients of imposing a christocentric proclamation of the gospel on every text or attempting to balance a severely exegetical sermon approach with a more theologically rounded liturgical order, expedients which have been criticized by Ritschl 1963, 142-150.

[¶53] **On the other hand, along with the necessity of continual change and experimentation in approaches to sermon development and styles in preaching there are also certain constraints and ever recurring themes in the content and the shape and tone of sermon work and preaching as**

demanded by a dominant faith in a sovereign loving God and by the message of good news of great joy for all people. And these constant themes and rhythms in sermon work and preaching may be illuminated by hard images from the world of building construction and by softer images from the world of music composition.

Ritschl also asserts, 21, as mentioned above [¶ 10, ¶ 45], that every sermon should proclaim good news, be positive. That assertion is based on his theological conviction, 145-146, that proclamation in preaching or teaching is behind every passage in the Bible and that the triune God, and Christ in particular, wants to reveal himself through the text of the day. Consider also Volbeda's conviction, cited in Stott 1982, 120, that the written word of God is pastoral through and through and that the true preacher must not be a mere "speaking tube" of God's written word but must be a pastor who is himself in heart and mind in perfect harmony with the pastoral scriptures. Massey 1980, 18, asserts that "The ultimate goal in preaching is to connect the hearer with the grace of God, and nurture that hearer in the life that grace makes possible when it is accepted and regarded in full." Massey 1980, 18-19, also writes about immediate goals for specific sermons, which I reference above [¶ 46] in relation to the target of a sermon. Von Allmen 1962, 25-26, notes the importance of preaching from the Old Testament, since salvation is an historical process, and of keeping a balance between historical analysis and a Christ centered hermeneutic when preaching from Old Testament passages. Wilson 2007, 219-220, discusses 'The Cross and the Old Testament' in his chapter on "Composing to Persuade," and he asserts, 219 shaded area, "Denying a christological center to the Old Testament one may still affirm a christological center to preaching. And, 247-262, he provides specific guidance for composing the sermon with a gospel hermeneutic, that is, reading the text through the lens of the cross and the resurrection (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 14] and in Book II, n. 4 [¶ 2] in reference to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust). As Gardner Taylor 1983, 151, has noted, "The Christian

preacher must not strain to make the Christ event explicit in every sermon. Where it is at all reasonable to state it, one ought.” And Keller 2015, 15-23, is still convinced based on 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5, that a Christocentric interpretation of the whole Bible is essential to preaching the gospel to the heart of contemporary culture. He develops the idea, 56-63, that preaching Christ every time and from every text is the only way to show people how the whole Bible fits together and also the only way to truly help people change from inside out. Long 2005, 57-58, states the case on the basis of the dual character of the Bible, in two sentences: “Because the Bible is in human language...everything about the Bible is culturally conditioned. Because the ultimate referent of biblical texts is God everything about the Bible is infused with gospel (also cited in Chapter I [¶ 14] and Chapter II [¶ 8]).

[¶54] Wilson 2007, 157-183, asserts that every sermon should have a deep structure that he calls, 160-174, the grammar of trouble and grace, which he describes, 162, as the form of the gospel as a literary genre, whether the exterior structure of the sermon is point-form divisions or narrative plotted or some other shape. Wilson acknowledges that the dialectic nature of trouble and grace sounds a lot like law and gospel but insists that different words are needed partly because of the way that the law and gospel construction has historically been abused in the service of antisemitism. He also acknowledges that some might confuse the dialectic of trouble and grace with the problem-solution model of preaching, but he asserts the important distinction that problem solving tends to put the burden on humans while trouble to grace shifts the burden from humans to God. For me, Wilson’s infrastructure metaphor brings to mind the softer and more kinetic image of the underlying bass beat of a serious musical composition. Compared to the infrastructure of trouble and grace, the image of rhythm or beat seems more commensurate with the narrativity of all preaching since a sermon in the preaching is a sequence in time rather

than a structure in place (per Lowry and Buttrick). For example, Handel's "Arioso" is a composition in which the rhythmic cycle that accompanies the melody line seems to be more than an equal partner in establishing and maintaining the mood and emotional impact of the music while the top or melody line is compelled to follow along and amplify, define, and celebrate that mood. Or, in the musical idiom of jazz, I, a non-musician and a devoted listener, had assumed that the instrumental soloists always take the lead while the rhythm section follows along in accompaniment. But I recently heard a National Public Radio (NPR) interview of a famous drummer who explained that he and his bassist partner were sometimes inspired to create a rhythm cycle and then present it to their virtuosic instrumental collaborators as a rhythm "pocket" within which the instrumental soloists might be inspired and guided and set free to strut their stuff. Need I mention that a strong beat is a constant feature of music in the classic rock and hard rock genres? "Give me the beat, boys, and free my soul. I want to get lost in your rock and roll, and drift away." Or, in another popular music genre, a successful rapper when asked on NPR "How do you compose the songs on your many successful albums of recorded music?" replied "I have never written a rap; I just ask my engineer in the studio to give me a certain beat and then I rap whatever words and stories that rhythm evokes." Of course, not all rappers and preachers must "compose" so extemporaneously or be strictly improvisational in the performance moment. But there is *The Chief Engineer* in the sermon preparation studio who has already given us the rhythm beat of preaching. It is the bass beat of the good news, the gospel of God's grace. I'm piling on here because the fixed infrastructure or preset and ongoing bass beat of Christian preaching is so important. A "Letter to the Editor" appeared in the Tulsa World on January 9, 2022, from Chris Powell of Tulsa asking for an apology from CBS television because a 31-second trailer for its new show "Good Sam" has the lead character, Dr. Rob Griffith, chief

of surgery at a fictional hospital, played by actor Jason Isaacs, in a conference with a group of aspiring surgeons, open the trailer with “...This is surgery, not a drum circle.” Powell complains:

Apparently, CBS, the writers, producers, actors, and everyone else associated with this show are either ignorant, or they’re flat-out racists for degrading Native American drum circles with this ridiculous analogy.

For those not familiar with traditional Native American drum circles, I offer this very short background. Drums, when formed in a circle, act as a way for Native Americans to stay in touch with their people, culture and connection to the spiritual world.

Tribes believe the sound of a drum compares to a human’s heartbeat and resembles the heartbeat of Mother Earth. For Native American people, when you beat a drum, you do more than make music. The rhythm created from the drum is the foundation of song and prayer.

On the same day, January 9, 2022, that Powell’s letter appeared in the newspaper, I heard a college adjunct professor of Spanish and Communication, Brent Sverdloff, a contestant on Bruce Adolphe’s Piano Puzzler in a rebroadcast of the January 5, 2022 episode of the NPR program Performance Today, hosted by Fred Child, say, when asked why he thought music education was so important, “I tell my students that everything you learn has structure and imagination—it’s mental, it’s physical, it’s emotional. And that certainly applies to music, which is fundamental to our being.”

[¶55] Perhaps Paul Scott Wilson would not be offended if I think of the deep structure of a sermon—the grammar of trouble and grace—as a kind of given beat or rhythm pocket in which the preacher/sermon-writer might be inspired, guided, and set free to strut her or his homiletic stuff using whatever exterior structure suits the text and preaching situation. The above rumination is not to suggest that Wilson’s template or deep structure of trouble and grace is simply static. It is, as Wilson indicates, dialectic, which suggests a moving oscillation between trouble and grace. And, of course, I recognize that the order of first the bass line and then the melody line is not a universal rule in music. The beat, the rhythm track or pocket, is not always the precedent or mood-setting feature in musical composition, performance, and improvisation.

Just a moment ago I heard the drummer of the “Talking Heads” group, being interviewed on NPR, speak of listening to the other musicians and then getting right into the pocket along with the bassist (his wife). But for preaching and sermon preparation, the deep structure of trouble and grace or the drumbeat of good news is always present; it is fixed, a given. The rhythm track of trouble and grace (Wilson) has already been laid down in the gospel. Or, as Lischer 2001 has it, the church of Jesus Christ only has one doctrine by which we read and interpret any and all texts of scripture, and that is the doctrine of grace. Fuller 1987, 340-341, allows his liturgical bonafides to overtake his credentials as a scripture scholar and homiletician when he notes, following the advice of the Consultation on Common Texts, how a preacher might choose to preach on an Old Testament passage for its own life-application message even though scheduled for its supposed correspondence with the Gospel lection, by having its message lead into the dismissal, sending forth to life and mission, at the end of the service, that is, jumping over the Eucharist. Such an apparently compelling need to justify Old Testament preaching by such liturgical gymnastics must be one of the ways that liturgiologists acquired the reputation of being fussy.

[¶56] **There is a common thread in all types of sermon work, styles of preaching, theological ilk, ecclesial connections and ethnic cultures: the use of story, symbol, image, example, and metaphor; all referencing common or recognizable experience in everyday life.**

One thing that expository preaching has in common with situational, thematic, topical, subject, doctrinal, image development, narrative, or any other style of preaching is the use of analogy, metaphor, images, experiences, stories, poetry, and examples from literature, history, current events, science, art, other religions, sports, entertainment, classroom and lecture hall, industry, commerce, trades, professions, home life and personal experience. Those forms of speech are the

basic linguistic coinage that the preacher uses to connect with the people and to help the people make connections with the text and the world in their lives and in their life together, that is, to connect or reconnect with the good news of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. Buttrick 1987, 41, points the way to avoiding didacticism in the development of sermon moves: "Preachers do not explicate teachings; they explore symbols" (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 62]). Borg 2003, 56-57, in a section headed "Metaphor as Bridge," relates hearing a Pentecostal preacher use Mark's account of Jesus healing a paralytic metaphorically to address Jesus' call 'Rise, take up your bed and walk,' to people whose lives had become paralyzed by various addictions and traumas. And he also reports having heard an Easter sermon in a conservative Baptist church in which the sentence "They went to the tomb, but *the tomb was empty*" is addressed to situations where people felt they had reached the end of their lives and hopes because of bitter disappointments, failures, or tragic losses, yet through resurrection faith had been restored to a life of hope, strength, and new beginnings.

[¶57] **In addition to using stories, symbols, metaphors, and images to illustrate some of the points in a sermon there is also the practice of structuring the whole sermon around some mundane image drawn from a text or from everyday life.**

Borg's two examples, mentioned immediately above, of preachers developing an image extracted from a scriptural text to address some of the life situations and issues that persons in the congregation have surely faced, and may be presently struggling with, represent a type of sermon structuring that Wilson 2007, 133, identifies as one of three major sermon forms: points with illustrations, narrative plotting, and *image development* (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 87]). Since noticing Wilson's naming of image development as a discreet approach to structuring in which the whole sermon is built around exploring thoughtful applications to everyday life of an

image drawn from a biblical story or an image drawn from contemporary experience, I have noticed two examples in homiletic literature in addition to Borg's two examples referenced above: first, Mitchell 1990, 118-119, tells of building a whole sermon around his experience of having the engine cooling system of his ancient car overhauled, in which various parts and functions of that mechanical system were paired with certain spiritual resources mentioned in the Bible; and he notes where his sermon script can be seen in an earlier publication. Second, Troeger 1990, 44-47, has a "visual wedding homily" that he developed as the imaginative, i.e., image-filled, story of a married couple he knew who told him that "every anniversary they donned their wedding clothes and had their picture taken in the living room of their house." The two examples given by Borg may be considered forms of expository or textual preaching because they begin with a passage of scripture, and they display something of the meaning and intention of that text. Mitchell's auto engine cooling system sermon is an imaginative way of setting forth lessons for life drawn from various scriptural teachings and resources and becomes a kind of allegory of biblical values and theological teachings. Troeger's wedding homily visualizes the challenges and blessings of faithfulness in mutual commitments made by life partners through the classic promises in the traditional marriage ceremony which was designed with scriptural teachings, values, and norms in mind.

[¶58] **A sermon that is structured around the development of an image will usually flow in a narrative-like way of holding up the image and looking at its various facets, exploring the parts or looking at it from different points of view.**

The book of Hosea provides a provocative and amazing example of a prophet structuring his message and acting out his message around a compelling image, the image of whoredom as a picture of Israel's flirtation leading into dalliance with the gods of other nations, i.e., their

Canaanite neighbors, and with idols of their own making. It is important to notice that as Hosea's message continues in its development there is a shift into more and more discursive language in which Hosea speaks or writes in the first person (I, me, my) as God addressing Israel in the second person (you, your) and reciting directly and descriptively the past actions and dispositions of the nation that constitute its whoredom and its whore-mongering. This shift into more direct or discursive speech is consistent with my discussion in Chapter III [¶ 19] and below ¶ 67] where I reference several homiletic theologians on the importance of balancing narration in sermons with some discursive or direct address in order to make clear the intent of the sermon. I myself, after noticing Wilson's identification of image development as a particular type of sermon design, recently preached a sermon in which I developed the image "apple of the eye," a familiar figure of speech in the everyday world of now, and which appears four times in the Bible in virtually all English translations of the Old Testament, one instance of which, Zechariah 2:8, recently appeared as the text of the day in the schedule of Bible readings that we follow in our breakfast table family devotions. I consider my sermon to be expository because it was developed in response to my encounter with a text of scripture and because the sermon did, in some measure, set forth the message and intention of that text and did, in a wider development of the apple of the eye image, lead to an exploration of whether the prodigal or the stay-at-home son was the apple of the loving father's eye, or whether it was both sons and, indeed, the whole family that was the apple of the parent's eye, just as the whole family of Israel was the apple of God's eye in the instances where that image appears in the Bible. The Hebrew word that was translated apple of the eye not long after that ancient image appeared in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is actually a technical term of biology referring to the pupil or aperture of the eye. Any nation that touches Israel had better be careful because that is like

touching the pupil of God's eye. It is noteworthy that the pattern of image development in these five examples is not properly deductive/propositional and not truly narrative in the sense of story but rather each consists of a sequence of sermon moves which, I suppose, is, after all, rather narrative or story-like but may also be seen as divisional or point-making. As Buttrick 1987, 285-303, has pointed out, there is a narrative dimension in all preaching since there is always a sequence of telling (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 16] and in Book II, n. 19 [¶ 3. c.]), a sequence that the preacher and congregation should plot with some intention or purpose in mind. But since Wilson 2007, 133, identifies image development as a sermon form or structuring design that is distinct from points with illustrations and narrative plotting, it is clear that narrative plotting refers to something more intentional than the general narrative character of all speaking which necessarily involves a time-lapse sequence in telling, of which Buttrick 1987, 285-303, wrote. Yet, on the other hand, it does not seem to me that image development, in the above examples is treated as what Buttrick 1987, 309, calls a "stock sermon form" into which a preacher might try to structure her message. It could simply be one of the many sermon patterns that might emerge in the use of Buttrick's structuring approach.

[¶59] **The dual nature of life in general and the biblical message in particular as containing both objective factual data and subjective emotive data makes it essential that preachers use both the discursive language of factual and analytical statements and the imaginative language of analogy, metaphor, image, symbol and story.**

Wilson 2007, 109, opens his chapter on "The Use of Stories, Images, and Experiences" with this paragraph:

Preachers are story tellers. Not only do they tell stories, but storytelling is an essential medium for preaching. People normally converse in story, and preaching strives to be conversational. Preachers tell Bible stories to bring them to life; even nonnarrative texts are more vital when portrayed through narrative and situated within a real-life setting.

Preachers also tell stories from experience in order to bring the joys and struggles of life before the Word of God and find in the shadow of the cross the new creation breaking into their midst. Stories entertain, generate humor, cause people to feel, actually generate experience in the preaching moment, and bear salvation.

And, 109-129, he discusses some useful approaches and guidelines for the effective incorporation of stories in sermons. And this refers not only to the use of examples and stories as illustrations but also to the use of imagination and imaginative language in a discursive way as the texts of scripture are interpreted in preaching. As Lowry 1997, 41, observes, if we lean toward the view of Davis 1958, 19, that the truth we preach is not an abstract thing but a Person, then our language use must turn to analogy and metaphor (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 23]). And Lowry 1997, 103, suggests that the homiletical mind that is needed to make or see connections between the world of the text and the world of the congregation requires the capacity for metaphor and analogy, which may be intuitively easy for some but for others must be cultivated and intended, i.e., effortful. As I mentioned in Chapter II [¶ 31], Ronald Allen 1998, 49-51, in a section on “Preaching in the Postmodern Ethos,” has a discussion, citing Wheelwright 1954, of two kinds of language used respectively in communicating two kinds of truth: (1) stenic language: factual, observable, logical; and (2) tensive language: conveys depth or non-empirical dimensions of life experience by way of stories, images, symbols, and myths. Allen observes that “most sermons contain both stenic and tensive elements.” Allen 1983, 30-34, had previously introduced these ideas in a section headed “Language as Symbolic Medium.” Further, Allen 1998, 208-217, has a discussion of how stories, images, and experiences function in a sermon, including a section, 210-212, headed “The Worlds Created, Evoked, and Authorized by Stories, Images, and Experiences” (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 11]). If it is true of preaching in general that metaphor, image, analogy and story are the basic linguistic coinage of the realm, the same is true “in spades” of the Black preaching tradition. Mitchell 1990, 31, attributes the picturesque

language and animated delivery so characteristic of Black preachers in part to a larger pattern of concreteness and aliveness in the African rhetorical and philosophical traditions which, generally, do not permit emphasis on abstractness.

[¶60] Thomas Guthrie (1803-1873) and John Jasper (1812-1901), two preachers of very different backgrounds, are both presented in Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 110, 232, as masterful painters of word pictures. Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 271, present a sermon “The Interpreter” by Joseph Parker (1830-1902) in which the use of poetry, metaphor, analogy, and vivid imagery along with technical exegesis is seen as essential to the power and authority of preacher, preaching and pulpit. Parker said, “Now always remember in following the interpretation of things that a flower may be looked at poetically as well as botanically.” Then he proceeds to describe how the botanist dissects the flower and labels its parts while the poet smells the fragrance, describes the color, hears the silent music, and turns the whole undissected flower into a parable. Similarly, Lischer 2001, ix (Preface—pages not numbered), insists that the real theological function of imagination in sermon preparation does not consist in finding analogical connections between the obscure world of the biblical text and the contemporary world in order to “make the Scriptures relevant” nor in scrambling for compelling illustrations to throw a contemporary light on the text, but rather “The work of the imagination is in knowing how to read texts in such a way that they will be allowed to function according to their original power and intent.” That perspective brings to mind Barth’s 1991, 93-94, caution against too much contextualization or transposing of scripture passages into contemporary categories, situations and needs of the church and world when selecting preaching texts and preparing sermons. Yet, that caution must be held in tension with Barth’s assertion, 127-129, that the “so what” of the text and sermon should be apparent in the preacher’s careful use of language throughout the

sermon. That is, 127, Item 5. b., which I referenced above [¶ 7], “It is to be recommended in principle that no statement should be made that is either explication alone or application alone. We should not play the role of the exegete who never deviates from the text. We should never lecture on the text but simply say what is there. This continuous sharpshooting means work. No explication, then, without application, or vice versa!” Surely that kind of communication requires that the preacher shall have engaged deeply with the text over many days or weeks until some imaginative connections are made between the text and present-day language and consciousness. Lischer 2001, Preface, ix, puts the matter this way: “The preacher holds the text like a precious stone and turns it against the light until its greatest brilliance is revealed. The preacher reads texts on behalf of others and *turns* them (the texts) so that they might once again release the brilliance of their witness to Jesus Christ.” And Lischer, 8-9, recognizes that the ability of the preacher/theologian to do that imaginative work with texts for the purpose of preaching stems from the preacher’s life as a human being in the world of the present and his or her pastoral work among the congregants/parishioners, and also requires the reflection of the preacher as theologian on the issues of the present age and on theology’s perennial dialogue with psychotherapy, anthropology, philosophy, ideology, politics, the arts, science, medicine, cybernetics, and ethics, all of which inform preaching and make it possible and intelligible. And that of course makes it essential that preachers read and converse broadly and not just in the specifically theological disciplines. James Sanders 1984, 61-68, indicates that work needs to be done in establishing some parameters or fair guidelines around historic instruments of biblical interpretation such as allegory, typology, and analogy if they are to be used in a continuing canonical process of resignifying or repurposing texts to meet current needs and situations in believing communities. And he discusses several examples of texts where certain internal

canonical hermeneutic approaches can be seen in relation to other parts of scripture, i.e., intertextuality; and other texts where certain external hermeneutic approaches can be seen in the history of interpretation from outside of the Bible as it is. Wilson 2007, 253-256, has a useful discussion of bringing the Bible as a whole to the selected or scheduled text in sermon preparation, including careful use of intertextual and typological connections.

[¶61] Blackwood 1946, 122, cites the experience of William M. Taylor maturing as an effective preacher by learning to discover analogies rather than being strictly argumentative, as is the tendency of many young exegetes. The advantages of imagination over argumentation in preaching are discussed in Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 263-264, 279-292; Lowry 1985, 78-91; Buttrick 1987, 113-170; Barbara Brown Taylor 1992, 40-53; Haddon Robinson 2001, 149-151; and Long 2005, 198-224. Long explores how analogies, examples, and metaphors are supposed to work in sermons, that is, the theological claims that they make on the lives of the hearers. Lowry 1985, 78-91, has a philosophical discussion of aesthetic knowing in relation to discursive knowing as a key to the function of metaphor, image, poetry, and parable in communicating religious faith. And in 1997, 40-44, he discusses how metaphor, image, analogy, and imagination are called for by the preacher's awareness of the social context of transformational preaching that is intended to evoke an experiential event among the participants. Allen and Springsted 2007, 27, observe that "it is only by means of analogy that Plato will speak of the Form of the Good." And, 67-72 and ff., they make clear, in a discussion of some of the classic teachings of the early Christian spiritual/theological fathers (aka patristic teachings), the essential place of analogy and metaphor in theological language. As I mentioned in Chapter I [¶ 8], Lischer 1988, 73-74, observes that expressive language rather than data driven language is appropriate for preaching understood as promise, the way things could be rather than

the way things are. And in 2001, 23, he discusses the function of story and storytelling in preaching as a way of opening up the teller and the hearer to a new future by way of the unfinished or open-ended purpose of stories, including biblical narratives such as the Book of Acts and even Paul's letters, that is, once again, the rhetoric of promise—the way things *could* be or *might* be. This brings to mind Borg's 2003, 126-148, chapter "The Kingdom of God: The Heart of Justice" in which he focuses on God's passion for justice that includes compassion, with descriptions of the way things *could* be and *would* be in this present world if God were directly and effectually in charge as King rather than the present rulers that are supposed to function as God's Viceroy's but who do not always share God's passion for justice that includes compassion, which I have cited more fully in Chapter I [¶ 8].

[¶62] Langer 1993, 79-102, discusses the logical distinction between discursive forms and presentational forms, and she suggests, 102, that this distinction will find practical application in individual studies of language, ritual, myth, music, art, science, mathematics, behavior, fantasy and dreams. Unfortunately, her list of possible future applications of the logical distinction between the functions of discursive and presentational forms of expression does not include theology or religion or spiritual life since she had previously, 10-17, relegated theology along with classical philosophy to the refuse pile of intellectual discards, accusing the theologians of retreating from the post Enlightenment intellectual community of the universities to the safe zones of their seminaries. Diogenes Allen 1989, 9, noted amid concern of many about the tendency toward relativism and pluralism in philosophical postmodernism that "The Enlightenment had already dismissed Christianity and left it outside the main intellectual stream." Again, 139, he cites John Bowker to the effect that such a removal of theology from the intellectual mainstream has been ongoing for over 400 years. That dismissal of the theologians

seems to reflect the situation at mid-twentieth century described by Allen and Springsted 2007, 196-197, wherein “existentialism was the only contemporary philosophical current with which theology had any vital contact” while “the dominant philosophical movements in the twentieth century as far as the universities are concerned are phenomenology and analytic philosophy, not existentialism,” noting that this prompted Paul Tillich to lament the circular conversation in which theologians read each other but are ignored by the rest of the intellectual world. And they note that “*since the Second World War...* both phenomenology and analytic philosophy have had an influence on Christian theology...,” (emphasis added) a development that did not yet appear when Tillich lamented and when Langer 1993 was first published in 1942.³ Yet, if the Enlightenment’s intellectual mainstream had in some respects dismissed Christianity, its scientific/historical approaches had also influenced biblical studies to the extent that James Sanders 1984, xv, wrote, “Enlightenment scholarship subsequent to the Reformation has so focused on original, historical meanings that it has very nearly decanonized the Bible. Its (the Bible’s) proper *Sitz im Leben*, or life setting, is the believing communities, Jewish and Christian, which find their identities in it and try to live their lives in the light of it. Its proper life setting is not the scholar’s study but the liturgical and instructional programs of believing communities; that is where it reaches full stature” (also cited in Chapter I [¶ 10]). Nevertheless, homiletic theologians and preachers may benefit by consideration of Langer’s 1993, 79-102, discussion of the logical distinction between discursive forms and presentational forms.

[¶63] The “new homiletics” seems to be in agreement with traditional homiletics and classical rhetoric on the importance of imaginative language and the use of analogies and metaphors in preaching. Fant and Pinson 1995, I, 59, 81-82, discuss and give examples of Chrysostom’s brilliant use of comparisons, similes, metaphors and analogies in his sermons even

though “the modern art of illustrating was unknown in his day.” Alter 1981, 46, takes note of the importance and place of narrative imagination and playfulness in sacred history, an observation which I have also cited in Chapter III [¶ 17]. Charles Rice, 1983, 106-108, describes the pervasive function of metaphor in the nature of the Bible itself and the task of communicating the gospel in preaching, and observes that text and metaphor are what some preaching consists of. Borg 1999, 150-152, calls attention to the metaphorical character of the New Testament’s christological images of Jesus as vine, door, word, wisdom, high priest, son, lamb, light, etc. And in 2001, 37-53, he describes how the historical critical approach to understanding the meaning of the Bible must be supplemented and combined with a metaphorical approach. (I have discussed Borg’s historical-metaphorical approach in Chapter II and referenced it in other places.) Bond 1996, 157-159, discusses the function of metaphor in the rhetorical task of proclaiming a gospel that partakes of apocalyptic myth. Bultmann 1958, 67-68, cautions that the mythological conceptions which are necessary as symbols or images within the language of faith must not be allowed to become literal, but “their meaning must be stated without recourse to mythological terms,” (referenced more fully in Chapter II [¶ 21])—not that one must explain or interpret every symbol or metaphor at every turn any more than one would destroy a joke by explaining it or apologizing for it before telling it or after telling it! Craddock 2002, 67-86, suggests that preachers follow Kierkegaard and Socrates in using the indirect communication of story, symbol, and questions to get under the skin of listeners concerning information that they already know. Wiersbe 1989, 16-18, suggests that Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) might have been emulating F. W. Robertson (d. 1853), whom he admired, in his preference for the indirect path of communication, teaching through feeling rather than reasoning, using stories, images, metaphors, and analogies rather than arguments. Troeger 1990, 90-91 and 119-120 quotes Eudora Welty,

David Tracy, Burch Brown, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on the parabolic, analogical and metaphorical character of belief and meaning in life, not only in language but also in action.

Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 120-122, discuss analogies and metaphors as a “treasury of verbal riches for embodying the good news.” Long 2005, 198-203, discusses the use of images and experiences in sermons as part of the language of communication rather than simply illustrations added to the message so as to throw light on it.

[¶64] Ricoeur 1975 discusses the semiotic approach and, 1995, discusses religion, narrative and imagination. Scholes 1974, 16 and passim, discusses the beginnings of a science of semiology as an aspect of structuralist thought. Some preachers with a poetic bent can effectively use new or original images, analogies, metaphors, and parables in their sermons. Lowry 1985, 85-87, discusses the power of parables as extended metaphors. The Public Broadcasting System presented the televised opera *The Postman* (aired Nov. 24, 2011 in Oklahoma with rebroadcasts at fall festival fund raisers) starring Plácido Domingo as Pablo Neruda, based on *Il Postino: The Postman*, Italian film by Michael Radford, in which the letter carrier, an aspiring poet, pumps the world renown poet for a definition of metaphor which he has been assured is the main tool that a poet must master technically and learn to use creatively. There is also a book, *The Postman (Il Postino) a Novel* by Antonio Skarmeto, based on the film! Borg 2003, 51, mentions Garrison Keillor’s creatively spun yarns of “The News from Lake Wobegon” on the *Prairie Home Companion* radio program as an example of truth communicated through fiction (also cited in Chapter III, [¶ 40]). Long 2005, following his discussion of the use of metaphor, 215-218, cautions, 222, against presenting made up illustrations without signaling that they are fictional, and provides guidance on how to acknowledge a fabrication unobtrusively. Ronald Allen 1998, 218, also suggests useful ways to signal to the congregation that a story is a creation. Wilson

2007, 110, acknowledges the necessity of fictionalizing in good story telling but emphasizes the fiction must always be used in the service of truth and he asserts: “The preacher must never lie, claim something as fact that is fictional, say that something was a personal experience that was not, or disclose something that was told in confidence” (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 40]). But while the importance of metaphor, analogy, symbol, image, and story is certainly not new or unique to the newer homiletics, there is clearly a major departure in the place and function of imagination, symbol, metaphor, and narrativity in the newer homiletics. The older homiletics that was heavily influenced by and structured around the classical rhetoric also emphasized the use of metaphor and analogy in the development of the sermon argument and the use of examples and stories in the form of illustrations. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, Blackwood 1942, 1946, and Davis 1958 all make that clear. When a preacher gets a grip on what good illustrations are and how they can function in a sermon, such as can be seen in the section on illustrations in Haddon Robinson 2001, 151-162, then he or she is much more able to come up with his or her own illustrations out of his or her own memory of reading and life experience rather than referring to anthologies of illustrations indexed by subject and/or function. She or he will also have less need to build a filing system of illustrations for future use since the best illustrations will usually be those that come to mind during the sermon study and development process, in which case, for preaching purposes, precise quotations and documentation will be less effective than giving a summary paraphrase from memory along with vague attribution or generic acknowledgment of borrowing.

[¶65] Carl 1983, 123, suggests that Craddock’s heavy use of story, experience, and example in his inductive structuring of sermons brings to mind the illustration-heavy homiletics of Halford Luccock. But Craddock 1983 [1971], 61-62, insists that the use of story and

experience in his inductive style is not so much illuminating a discussion already given as actually functioning to inform and convince the hearers. Craddock sees his stories as the medium and the inductive argument of the message, not as illustrations of a stated proposition or adornments of the message. And, as Lowry 1997, 18, has pointed out, Craddock's impulse to shift preaching from deductive to inductive format was not primarily his concern for effective communication (which was also strong) but rather his concern for the integrity of biblical exegesis. For, wrote Craddock 1983 [1971], 124, "Exegesis is inductive if it is healthy and honest." Also related to the matter of sound exegetical work is Lowry's observation, 31, that in the area of parable studies there has been a movement "from the understanding that a parable has *one* point to the notion that a parable *is* a point." Lowry, 18-19, also notes that while Craddock's main impulse for shifting to time sequential inductive and narrative sermon structuring was his deep commitment to sound exegesis, his own impulse toward time sequencing or narrative structuring in sermons was his experience as musician—jazz piano performance, an example of which was a special treat at the 1979 General Assembly of the former United Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, MO., at which I was a commissioner. Thus, a key difference that can be seen when examining actual sermons of Luccock, for example, in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 15-42, and sermons of Craddock: Luccock's stories (illustrations) are saying: "Here are some stories that are examples suggesting present day applications of the message of the text as I have just explained it," while Craddock's stories presented after a simple reading of the text are saying, "Here's a story or several stories and I'm sure you will see how they are connected to each other and the text and where they are pointing." Long 2005, 125-126, notes that Craddock sees his inductive problem-solving sermon format as imitating the typical approach to the solving of everyday life problems as well as the typical approach to solving the problem of understanding a

scripture text during sermon preparation. And Craddock 2010, 204, reiterates that the story does not illustrate or throw light on the message, but the story *is* the message – and he gives as examples Nathan’s message to David in the story about confiscating a powerless neighbor’s precious lamb and Jesus’ message about the relationship between forgiveness and righteousness in one of the stories of a loving father who had two sons. Mitchell 1990, 118, references “an old African tradition (that) anthropologists refer to as ritual insult” along with Craddock’s 1978 (2002) *Overhearing the Gospel* when he notes that the communicative power of a Black preacher’s recasting of a message from Paul to a troublesome Corinthian congregation as a letter written in contemporary language is in the fact that the present congregation can be more receptive when overhearing a message originally directed to another congregation at a different time and place. And he observes that this device gives “permission to be candid by indirection.” If Luccock’s preaching style was heavy with illustrations as Carl 1983, 123, indicates, he did not consider the stories to be the strength or to *be* the message of the sermon, according to Long’s 2005, 117, citation: “The power of the sermon lies in its structure, not in its decoration,” wrote Luccock.

[¶66] Long 2005, 198-203, tracks the nineteenth to twentieth centuries detour in homiletic teaching from the classical rhetorical view of stories and examples used for the purpose of persuasion toward a changed approach to life to the idea that examples and stories from experience were used in sermons for the purpose of clarification, that is, to facilitate the impartation of technical knowledge of, say, “Bible facts,” or “what God does in the Eucharist.” But Long, rather than abandon the use of the word illustration in his homiletic teaching, continues to use it but with a broader function and meaning than that of throwing light on the sermon’s argument, that of actually communicating the sermon’s message and being integral to

the sermon's structure and strategy. Ricoeur 1975, 75-80, discusses the distinction between metaphorical word substitution in traditional rhetoric and metaphorical statement introducing new information in modern syntax, and he spells out two claims: "(a) that metaphor is more than a figure of style, but contains *semantic innovation*; (b) that metaphor includes a denotative or referential dimension, i.e., the power of *redefining reality*." Thus Ricoeur, 81, departs from pure structuralism by holding (with Frege) that every statement is not only related to other statements in the language system but also has a reference function in the world of experience; and he holds that to be true of metaphorical statements in particular. Langer 1993, Chapter V, "Language," especially 132-143, discusses a symbolic as distinct from a signalistic view of language to the effect that metaphor is not just a later embellishment of language for the sake of a cultural product called poetry or, I would add, for the sake of rhetoric in preaching! Langer further observes, 201, that "language in its literal capacity...is a most excellent instrument of exact reason," but "is a stiff and conventional medium unadapted to the expression of genuinely new ideas, which usually have to break in upon the mind through some great and bewildering metaphor." This discussion seems to be, paradoxically, alternating between the essentially symbolical character of all language and the importance of using symbolic rather than direct or literal signification language in certain contexts, and so it is. So here goes the next switchback: Langer, 234, agrees with the statement of W. M. Urban, "The poet (and I would add the preacher) does well to speak in figure... For there is no literal expression, but only another symbol." And Buttrick 1987, 113-116, goes further than most in making clear that the use of imagery, symbol and story is not just a matter of communication technique but represents a shift away from a past tense view of God's presence and work in the world, a theological shift from salvation history to faith symbols that shape a social consciousness. He restates in various ways

throughout *Homiletic* that analogy is not only a tool of preaching communication but is essential in how we discern the present function of a text, as in, 403, “We have argued that, as texts are understood by analogies of experience, they form *contemporary* meaning, a patterned field in consciousness.” Neaves 1980, 111, discusses how the metaphor/analogy/story/experience requirements of the language of preaching communication changed and broadened his study and reading habits away from a narrow focus on theology and biblical exegesis, yet without neglecting these. Von Allmen 1962, 52-53, discusses the importance of the preacher's knowledge of the everyday world—what's happening now in high places and on the local streets. Yet, he also warns against overloading sermons with anecdotes, images, and topical talk, and urges a balance between careful exegetical work and concern for a lively and joyful delivery.

[¶67] Craddock 2002, 67-68, discusses the necessity of using *direct* (literal) communication to set the stage or clarify the intention, context, and referents of *indirect* (figurative) communication through image, story, and symbol. He also, 76-77, discusses the necessity of using direct communication rather than images and stories in missionary and evangelistic preaching. This seems contrary to Langer's observation cited above about the necessity of using metaphor to break in upon the mind with a new idea, which is the very heart of evangelization. I think that missionary or evangelistic preaching, like all preaching, needs a balanced diet of direct and indirect speaking—figurative and literal, narrative and discursive. Perhaps Craddock's intention would be compatible with Don Wardlaw's 1983, 70-72, observation that narrative style presentations in preaching should include discursive intervals in order to avoid leaving the hearers stranded and without a clue as to the sermon's intent (also referenced above [¶ 58] and in Chapter III [¶ 19]). That caution applies to all preaching including evangelistic, missionary, and apologetic preaching. Connecting the stories is essential just as are

the transitions from division to division or point to point in traditional rhetoric, to help the audience in following the speaker's train of thought. I have discussed transitions, with good and bad examples, above [¶ 49]. Yet one must also be careful not to weaken the impact of narrative by explaining the "point" of the story. Mohr and Mohr 1982, 105, note that some homiletics, preachers, and other scripture scholar/theologians don't give modern congregations sufficient credit for being able to hear stories, including pre-scientific or mythological material, without taking everything in them as literal, scientific, or historical fact. And, as Ronald Allen 1998, 214, observes, explanations of stories, images, and experiences where no explanation is needed can be demeaning to the congregation and may drain the example of its power. I cited Craddock 2011, 292-293, above [¶ 26] to the effect that he would rather not get the joke than to have it explained. As noted above, Lowry 1985 discusses narrative style and sequence in preaching quite apart from telling stories or, stitching stories together. Surely a preacher's attention to such a flow of thought, a sense of sequence in time rather than location in space on a page or mental chart board, could be conducive to rather than a hindrance to evangelistic, missionary, or apologetic preaching. After all, it seems obvious that spiritual conversion takes place at some time in a life trajectory or narrative rather than at some location on the diagram of a discourse or at the end of a list of steps spelling out the "plan of salvation." Of course, metaphor, image, story, and parable are not only the necessary and pervasive language of preaching but also of the Bible itself, as G. Ernest Wright 1952, 121-122, makes clear as he begins to make his case of serious reservations about Bultmann's program of demythologization, wherein he suggests that Bultmann himself uses mythological concepts as he discusses the existential experience of encounter with God in Christ.

their own preaching as a serious theological discipline and to include homiletic theologians in the line-up of writers for their daily routine of theological reading.

It is not necessary that the preacher shall have studied all of the good homiletic approaches in order to get up the next sermon. But if he or she is devoting an hour or so each day to serious reading in the theological disciplines in addition to time spent in exegetical studies for the next few sermons, then that preacher should occasionally, perhaps once every year or so, devote a week or so of that theological study time to reading or rereading a book on homiletics. After all, homiletics is a very important theological discipline, notwithstanding Gerald Kennedy's 1947 complaint that "some theological schools treat homiletics as if it were a poor relation...and often a man without faculty standing is engaged to listen to a few student sermons," cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 146-147. Lischer 1988, 66-69, and 2001, Preface (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 46]) complains that seminary curricula and the homiletics academy continue to obscure the essential theological nature of homiletics by placing the teaching of preaching in the "practical theology department" and constructing their homiletic texts and dissertations around disciplines other than theology. I, on the other hand, experienced a revelation while reading homileticians of the late twentieth century as well as earlier and later ones, that most of those writers were and are serious theologians as reflected in their homiletic writings. Long 2005, ix-xi, wrote of the transition in the 1980's of the study of homiletics and other aspects of Christian life and church life from the "practical theology department" to essential parts of Christian theology proper. Fant 1975, 117, observes regarding Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde lectures on homiletics that "in these lectures as in Bonhoeffer's life and thought, the 'practical' and the 'theoretical' are such an integral part of one another that one scarcely knows when the first begins and the other leaves off." The reading and rereading of homiletic theology strengthens the preacher's access to various

homiletic strategies and also her skill in developing the component sermon moves for executing a chosen strategy. Buttrick 1987, 37-53, has a helpful section on developing sermon moves.

[¶69] **The question of why expository preaching is important leads into an exploration of the relationship that has developed during the histories of Judaism and Christianity between the knowledge of God in human experience and the understanding of the scriptures as the record of the faith community's memory of how God has acted and spoken with people in the past, in particular Judaism's memory, recorded in the Hebrew Bible, of God's historical dealings with ancient Israel and the church's memory, recorded in the New Testament, of God's eternal Word/Wisdom/Logos appearing in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth .**

The question of why exposition of scripture in preaching is important also invites consideration of the fact that people in Christian communities have long been acculturated to the notion that the Bible is the Word/Wisdom/Logos of God in written form and that preaching based on that Word is God's chosen instrument for drawing people into active relationship with God and God's family of believing communities; and God's chosen instrument for the scheduled maintenance of that bond of peace in faith communities during their time of service.

Massey 1974, 82-86, after establishing that "*Preaching that lives will be done with a sense of partnership with God and Christ*" through the Holy Spirit, makes clear that in order for that partnership to be real, "*The Sermon that would live and make alive must be rooted in the Word of God.*" Wilson 2007, 5, claims that "preaching is an event in which the congregation hears God's Word, meets their Savior, and is transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit to be the kind of community God intends." That definition requires, according to Wilson, that scriptural exegesis be at the heart of sermon preparation. Barth 1991, 44, 48-49, 63-65, 75-81, 88, insists repeatedly that preaching that is in conformity with the scriptures, preaching in which the Word of God is present and active, must be preaching that expounds a text of the Scripture, that is,

expository preaching is a command not an option. Thus Barth, 44, does not define expository preaching, rather, he makes “An Attempt at a New Definition” of preaching, and ends up with two formulas that, taken together, “form the answer to the question of the relation between the Word of God and the human word,” and asserts that “The totality forms a closed circle which begins with God and ends with him.” Here are the two definitions or formulas:

1. *“Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission.”*
2. *“Preaching is the attempt enjoined upon the church to serve God’s own Word, through one who is called thereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making it relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they have to hear from God himself.”*

And Barth begins the explanation of the necessity of the duality of his definition as follows:

The difference in approaches—first from the top down, then from the bottom up—is grounded in the fact that one cannot answer the question of preaching in a single statement. The answer lies beyond what can be said in a single answer. If we want to speak honestly and conscientiously about the true reality, we can only set up a signpost that points past human reflection to *the* subject that lives and moves in itself, that remains the subject and never becomes the content of a concept.

Some preachers and specialists in teaching homiletic theology seem to be impatient with Barth’s singlemindedness about how all Christian preaching must conform to the requirements of the Scripture, and, more generally, impatient with Barth’s Word of God theology in his many volume work *Church Dogmatics*. It is instructive that in the 1991 edition of Barth’s homiletics lectures of the 1930’s both David Buttrick in the Foreword and chief translator Geoffrey W. Bromiley in the Preface suggest that there is a foretaste of what was to come in the further development of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* in his ideas in the homiletics seminars with regard to sermon preparation as theology and theology as sermon preparation, along with suggesting a correspondence between the order of Barth’s career trajectory from pastoral work to academic theology.

[¶70] Consider this: If there is much merit in Barth’s 1936 definition of the task of

theology as examining the preaching of the Christian church in the light of the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ as witnessed in the scriptures of Old and New Testaments; and if a preacher may be encouraged by Dodd's 1958 [1929] examination of the authority of the Bible in terms of how the scriptures have actually functioned in the history of biblical faith communities and in the faithful lives of believers; and if there is merit in Ricoeur's 1995, 71, assertion of an inherent or necessary link between word-based religions and proclamation; and if preachers may find some guidance in Lischer's 2001, 1-15, discussion of "Preaching as Theology," including What Theology Does for Preaching and What Preaching Does For Theology (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 46]); then surely there is also some merit in suggesting that church preachers today or any day should consider themselves to be church theologians, scripture theologians, and homiletic theologians as well as faithful participants in Christian community who strive to preach from the scriptures and from their ongoing study of church theology and from their own experience of Christ's presence in Christian community and from their own knowledge of God through faith in Christ, in a way that allows the word of God to do its authoritative work in God's church and God's world at the present time. As to the practical function of the preacher's continuing study of church theology along with exegetical work on a text of scripture, Barth 1991, 106, cautions against introducing dogmas (theological teachings) into a sermon word for word, and in the process showing off our learning. Rather, we should let our conversance with current and historical dogma "be signposts from which to take direction. Reflection upon dogma will guard us against our own imaginings. Dogma is a good pair of glasses with the help of which we can look at the text cheerfully and confidently. Doing this will save us from caprice, but we must do it with discipline and a sense of responsibility that is firmly based in the church" (in part also cited in Chapter III [¶ 46]). Long 2005, 226, discusses the sermon/preaching event as a product of

the church, i.e., preacher and congregation, and not simply a product or property of the preacher. And Bonhoeffer in *Ethics* as cited in Fant 1975, 41-42, indicates that it is principally the congregation who are both to welcome the message of the church's preaching very eagerly and to examine the scriptures every day to see whether these things are so (Acts 17:11) (Fant's reference is to the SCM edition of *Ethics* 1955, 260. The same can be seen in the Macmillan Paperback Edition 1965, 294). Long 2005, 52-68, makes a strong case for preaching that presents the *biblical witness* in terms of the theological tradition and the social location of the faith community in which the preacher stands and to which the preacher preaches, that is, expository or biblical preaching as normative. Craddock 2010, 47, notes that the theological context of preaching means that the preacher is a theologian and, 127-129, the ecclesiastical context, a church with a canon of scripture, means that the preacher must be an interpreter of scripture. Willimon 1981, 19, asserts that the Bible rather than a felt human need is the necessary starting point of Christian proclamation (also cited by Old 2010 [vol. 7], 53). Ritschl 1963, 8, asserts that preaching from subjects and topics rather than from scripture texts would not have sustained the confessional churches of Germany during the Hitler years (1933-1945). And he asserts, 68, that when it comes to the teaching of the Reformers and others that preaching from the written word as a work of the Holy Spirit in the church *is* the word of God, "the clearest expression of this truth is the fact that there is no other way to preach than to preach an 'expository sermon'" (also referenced below [¶72]). The quote marks around expository sermon indicate Ritschl's acknowledgement of problems with the term, addressed in his n. 38 of Chapter I (p. 68). Ritschl further asserts in his foreword to Chapter III, *The Sermon*, 127, "The proclamation cannot be based on an analysis of the situation of the world, but it leads to an understanding of it."

[¶71] Lischer 2001, 14, discusses a reciprocal relationship between theology and

preaching under the heading “Preaching as Theology” (also referenced in previous paragraph [¶ 70] and in Chapter III [¶ 46]). and borrows a phrase of Gerhard Ebeling to assert that “the preacher ... *executes the text* by helping it to speak to a particular time, situation, and people,” and he asserts that if theology is, in the words of Heinrich Ott, “‘the reflective function of preaching itself,’ then preaching might be termed the *projective* or public function of theology itself.” And Lischer observes that “the majority of Christians encounter theology only in this, its final form, preaching.” And Lischer states that “The movement from proclamatory theology to theological proclamation results in a three-fold confluence: in the preacher, in the Christian community, and in the sermon, in which “The preacher *is* the exegete, systematician, dogmatician, historian, and pastor” (also cited below in Chapter V [¶ 11]). And Lischer, 15, observes, concerning that confluence of theological disciplines in the preacher that “If the desired integration is to take place in theology, it may begin with the recognition of the legitimacy of preaching as a theological discipline.” Thus, it is important to Lischer not only that the theological academy recognize homiletics as theology and not just as an appendage, “practical theology,” to the basic theological curriculum, but that ministers are doing theology in all of their sermon preparation and preaching and other pastoral activities. Wilson 2007, 1-52, 229-262, makes a strong case that the expository preacher’s sermon preparation work must follow historical critical exegesis with “theological exegesis” (What is God doing or intending in the text?) and interpret the text with a “gospel hermeneutic” (Where is the good news in the text?) (also referenced below [¶ 73]). Craddock 1983, 38-39, cites Barth and Bultmann and quotes Gerhard Ebeling on the inseparability of theology and preaching. Bultmann 1951, 1955, II, 241-251, cites many 19th and 20th century authors and works in discussing the relationship between theology and proclamation or the knowledge of God (theology) and kerygma (proclamation or gospel message) under the

heading of a survey of “The History of New Testament Theology as a science,” including a reference 241-242, to a naïve identification of kerygma and an early occurrence of the title “Biblical Theology” in work by C. Hayman 1708. Bultmann states at the end of that section, 251, that the task of New Testament theology is to make clear a believing self-understanding in reference to the kerygma. And I think that is surely a large part of the task of Christian preaching.

[¶72] Willimon 2005, 8, notes that the key to effective proclamation in sermons that speak to the hearts, minds, and souls of the hearers is the word theology (*theos* = God; *logoi* = words), God words. “Preaching is what God says.” And, 53-54, he cites approvingly Bonhoeffer’s assertions that the world exists for the sake of the proclaimed word, and that the proclaimed word *is* the incarnate word. Craddock 2010, 51, asserts that preaching is not just a message about the content of God’s past revelation in the word of scripture and the Christ event; preaching is a continuation into the present of God’s revelation; revelation is not just in the content of the sermon, revelation is the mode of the sermon. Lischer 2001, 48-62, devotes a chapter to the concept that preaching *is* the Word of God. And, 58, he indicates that of the several points on the Bible’s circle of authority—inspiration, antiquity, clarity, beauty, truthfulness, divine authorship, and gospel—the point that actualizes that authority in liturgical reading and preaching is gospel. Further, Lischer, 59, acknowledges that “To claim for our flatulent pronouncements the status “Word of God’ may be a bit much to swallow;” but he affirms that “to fail to make that claim...is to forget that, as long as our frailty represents frailty *before God*, it is never absolute, for he is able to make of it what he wills,” citing Barth 1936, 136: “For so far as proclamation rests upon recollection of the revelation attested in the Bible and is therefore the obedient repetition of the Biblical witness, it is no less the Word of God than the Bible.” According to Ritschl 1963, 25-39, the first form of the word of God as words is the preached word, not the written word. I take it he

is referring not only to historical chronology but also to the reality that the preached word is primary in the existential experience of every present moment including every Christian worship service. He discusses the word of God in three aspects: the incarnate and redeeming Word in Jesus Christ, the preached word in the oral witness of the apostles, and the written witness of the Bible which he sees as the revealed word of God. He then observes a parallel between this view of the word of God and the Trinitarian view of the Godhead as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ritschl also joins the Reformers and others in affirming that preaching from the written word as a work of the Holy Spirit in the church *is* the word of God. And, as noted above [¶ 70], he asserts, 68, “the clearest expression of this truth is the fact that there is no other way to preach than to preach an ‘expository sermon.’” Gardner Taylor 1983, 141-142, with a title-writer’s penchant for word plays—think “Creeds and Deeds” or “Profits and Prophets”—states that a sermon should lift up both the “revelant” (term coined by Kyle Haselden) and the relevant and show how the two interface in life. Fant 1975, 30, has the following citation from Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*, edited by Eberhard Bethge: “The word which came from heaven in Jesus Christ desires to return again in the form of human speech... In the place of God and of Jesus Christ there stands before the congregation the bearer of the office of preaching with his proclamation.” (As noted above [¶ 70], Fant’s reference is to the SCM edition of *Ethics* 1955, 259. The same may be seen in the Macmillan Paperback edition, 1965, 293.) Bonhoeffer 1975, 126, makes the same assertions in the first paragraph of the second lecture on preaching: “The proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself...The preached Christ is both the Historical One and the Present One...The proclaimed word is not a medium of expression for something else, something which lies behind it, but rather it is the Christ himself walking through his congregation as the Word.” Fant 1975, 30-31, also cites from *Letters and Papers from Prison*, rev. ed. 1967, 161, Bonhoeffer’s hope and

expectation and faith that a time would come when the spoken human word would again be the vehicle through which the Word of God would renew and transform and restore the world (This reference may also be seen in the Enlarged Edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison* 1971, First Macmillan Paperbacks edition 1972, 300). And, of course, if it is the presence of Christ in the spoken word that gives hope of the restoration of God's world, then the presence of Christ in the proclamation must also be the instrument for God's restoration of the church to its true self, which was a key point in Bonhoeffer's theological criticisms of the church, according to Gerhardt Ebeling as cited in Fant 1975, 60.

[¶73] And, clearly, if the presence of Christ in the true proclamation of the Word of God is a necessary element of the church's true self, then the church can never be its true self where ministers read homilies or adapt the sermons of others or cobble together some remarks from so called sermon helps and thus fail to proclaim the word of God. Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 10, report on Alexander Maclaren's criticism of fellow preachers whose interpretations of Christian truth "do not grow, are not shaped by patient labor, but are imported into the new owner's mind ready-made 'in Germany' or elsewhere, but certainly not in his own workshop." When a congregation dies or is declining along with a general decline in religious interest, the failure may be attributed in part to certain local conditions or to general sociological, cultural, theological, philosophical and intellectual trends of the times. Yet, a necessary but missing and overlooked ingredient of the health, stability, and growth of the church is the genuine proclamation of the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, according to God's written word which is also living and active (Heb. 4:2). When that is missing, any pointing to other trends of the times is simply an evasion. Considering the importance of honest biblical preaching from a more practical and historical perspective, I note that according to Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 180, Charles R. Brown (1862-

1950) was convinced that true and effective preaching of God's word in the churches is highly influential in producing a more democratic and Christian spirit in industry and labor and in vitalizing the church. Brown 1922, 19, wrote "The fate of our Protestant Christianity is in my judgment bound up in large measure with the rise and fall of effective preaching. If you will read your church history, reading between the lines as well as along them, you will find it so." And it should also be noted, as a corollary to Brown's assertion, that when evidence and general perception indicate that the influence of preaching in church and world is in decline or at a low ebb, as Craddock 1983 (1971) asserts that it is in our time, the importance of true, real, honest and effective preaching remains exactly the same as ever. The importance of preaching as theology and theology as preaching, as discussed and referenced above, including biblical expository preaching as defined above, is a constant—it does not change with the ebb and flow of public respect for preaching and organized religious participation. Wilson 2007, as mentioned above [¶ 71], indicates that the preparation of truly expository sermons requires following historical exegesis with theological exegesis that is infused with a gospel hermeneutic. And, 160, in his discussion of the "grammar of trouble and grace" as the deep structure of every sermon regardless of its exterior structure, whether point-form or narrative, he has this luminous paragraph about the causes of the decades long decline in religious interest and church participation:

Whatever reasons one gives for the decline of membership in many denominations in recent decades, this much seems clear: people leaving the church seem not to have heard the gospel in a way that facilitates faith-filled lives in these difficult times. These folks leave church walking in the old creation, and if there is a new creation begun in preaching, they have not experienced it. The shadow of the cross did not fall across their pew, and the dawn of a new era did not illuminate their paths. Most worrisome is the thought that the next generation is not receiving the faith as the previous one did. If people find the Christian message irrelevant, it could be that God is hard to find in many sermons, and the gospel has gone missing. It is hard to proclaim the gospel if God is not in the program. How does one preach the gospel?

And, 214, Wilson acknowledges that, in many cases, seminary students, and thus the seminaries,

fail to adequately integrate the development of skill and knowledge in biblical and theological studies with the development of skill and knowledge in pastoral, liturgical, and homiletical work. And he concludes that paragraph this way: “The fact remains that most churches with vacancies list strong preaching as the greatest need.”

[¶74] Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 297, report that Paul Sherer (1892-1969) stipulated in accepting the 1920 pastoral call of the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church of New York City that he was to have every morning to study, and they report that he spent at least thirty hours a week in sermon preparation, and that he also put a high priority on pastoral visitation, and was convinced that to be an effective preacher one must be an effective pastor. The congregation grew from 350 members to 1,000 members during his 25-year pastorate there. Such growth of course can be partially attributed to other factors such as the cultural and religious climate and trends of the time and the radio ministry that Sherer conducted during the second half of his tenure. But I mention the example of Sherer to remind myself and others that being faithful to our primary divine and ecclesiastical call to preaching work and pastoral work must be constant regardless of conditions and trends in church and society and regardless of all the other functions, engagements, responsibilities, and interests that make demands or enticements upon our time, energy and attention. If these two primary functions are not honored in practice by the preacher/pastor and the congregation, then any other strategies, emphases, or programs that may be implemented to promote church growth or to stem a tide of church decline will surely be weakened in their effectiveness or even be rendered non-effect or counterproductive. After all, what does it profit a congregation if it gains many adherents but loses its soul?! On the other hand, when the whole church or a denomination or a congregation is experiencing revival or revitalization of fellowship life and outreaching humanitarian service and a surge of growth in membership, some of the

causes of such signs of life may be seen in various cultural and societal trends, for example, the post-World-War-II surge in religious interest which it seems was part and parcel with the family-building forces that helped create the baby boom, the surge in home and industrial and infrastructure and college construction, the urban and suburban sprawl, and the long term economic expansion of America and the rest of the industrialized world. But if the revitalization at that time or at any time in any pocket of religious communities – if it is a revitalization of the church’s “true self” (Bonhoeffer in Fant 1975, 60, citing Gerhard Ebeling), then the one necessary element, along with the administration of the sacraments according to the way of Christ, will be the true and honest proclamation of the word of God (Calvin, *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter I, Article 9). Some of the preachers in the vibrant and expanding churches at the present time (turn of the 21st century) seem to be cobbling their messages together from “sermon helps” or “lectionary aids;” or reading canned homilies or adapting the published sermons of others; or spewing the toothy grinning-faced feel-good prosperity gospel. Others can be seen and heard extemporizing a patented message of ideological evangelicalism that is 60 % exegetical Bible lesson, the good news message of which is interlaced with and obfuscated by the 40 % which is uncontrolled, off-the-cuff blather and irrelevantly and incoherently muttered asides. How such gibberish can be considered evangelical, i.e., biblical good news, is beyond rationality. Such a performance defies Barth’s 1991, 119, dictum that sermons should be written out and carefully edited because the preacher of God’s word will be held accountable for every stray word spoken, perhaps an allusion to Matthew 12:36: “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter” (also cited in Chapter V [¶ 22]). A vibrant and growing church that features and feeds upon any of the above described caricatures of Christian preaching is quite simply not the “church’s true self” (Bonhoeffer), not truly a church of God, which,

according to Calvin, does not exist without the true and honest preaching of the word of God and the administration of the sacraments according to the way of Christ.

[¶75] Consider the stand point or sit point of the person in the pulpit, ambo, or pastoral preaching chair (*cathedra*) before an open Bible on a Sunday morning, a position which is an important reminder to the preacher and the people that it's not about the preacher's stage presence or peripatetic speaking ability but about the word of God for the people of God. Craddock 2010, 212, discusses the symbolic importance of reading the scripture text from a pulpit Bible rather than from memory or from separate pages. It is true, as Dargan 1904, 88, and Maxwell 1949, 16, note, that there is a precedent in the third and fourth centuries for reading the Scriptures from a rostrum or raised platform and delivering the sermon from the steps to the rostrum. And it is true that the preaching of Jesus and the apostles was often done along the way rather than in the meeting place. But I do not buy the argument that the use of a pulpit is a barrier to effective preaching, as Craddock 1983, 15, indicates. Quite to the contrary: the preacher's pacing around the podium or up and down the steps and aisles so that people must keep shifting in their seats to see her face is a huge barrier to effective preaching, a distraction to those worshipers who are intent on receiving the message. And when the peripatetic preacher carries index cards or a sheaf of papers or a hand-held electronic device, what's the point of disrespecting the symbolic and aesthetic architectural setting of worship in which the church has invested much thoughtful design, feeling, theology, and treasure? And even if the preacher does this dance all over the podium and up and down the steps well and captivantly, I seriously question whether she is communicating more of the gospel or more of herself. Granted she is called to communicate the gospel by communicating herself as a vessel of the gospel. But the gospel-filled self will defer to the gospel as gospel in an appropriate balance. Willimon 1981, 95-96, warns of the danger of

making the sermon into a performance with too much autobiography rather than a self-offering. And in 2005, 51, he cites Karl Barth's endorsement of John the Baptizer's pointing to Jesus rather than himself (John 3:25-30) as the model for every preacher of every age. And I note that what occasioned that verbal clarification by John was the same thing that had also prompted John's "brood of vipers" reprimand of some who came to him for baptism (Matt. 3:7, Lk. 3:7), and that was the fact that until Jesus appeared on the scene John's preaching-while-walking-around-in-the-wilderness-wearing-strange-clothing drew attention mainly to himself rather than to the meaning of his message, so that John was led to question the sincerity of the performance enthusiasts who attended his ministry.

[¶76] Keller 2015, 13-14, reports that John Calvin in commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:17 makes clear that the gestures and flourishes of the rhetorical arts are not to be avoided altogether but that whatever of human wisdom or technique is employed must be done in the service of the gospel message, "so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power." Bonhoeffer 1975, 138-139, paints a self-portrait in words of his intended stance for preaching in such a way that he serves as a facilitator who keeps a certain distance between himself and the particular subject of the Word which he accompanies as the text makes its way among the congregation. And he lists some of the rhetorical and emotional techniques, personae, attitudes, and tricks that are to be avoided; such was Bonhoeffer's faith in the power and intention of the Word to make its own way among the people if only the preacher would get out of the way. I have discussed some of Bonhoeffer's thoughts on how the preacher may best facilitate rather than obstruct the intention of the text and of Christ to walk among the people in Chapter III [¶ 18, ¶ 23, ¶74], citing Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 109-111. Of course, Bonhoeffer was using a certain rhetorical device very effectively by addressing this advice to his students in the first-person voice, referencing his own

practice in preaching, not that there is anything wrong with that, but it is a device more appropriate in a homiletics lecture than in a sermon, so I infer from the report of Bonhoeffer's lectures at Finkenwalde. The preacher who overdoes the business of walking around and gesticulating while preaching is sure to draw more attention to himself than to the gospel message or to the presence of Christ in the room. An exception might be granted in the case of a natural orator such as John Jasper (1812-1901) the slave/freedman preacher written up in Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 225-257, whose compelling speech and brilliant mind worked together best when he was stalking back and forth across the platform gesticulating wildly and painting a vivid word and motion picture of what he was feeling and saying about God, the gospel, and God's people. But I do not accept the notion that Jasper or any other speaker who has the gift or compulsion of compelling communication while walking around making like a windmill is an example to be emulated or learned by other preachers. I adapt what Buttrick 1987, 147, said about humor and wit in the pulpit: if you are not a naturally peripatetic speaker, please don't try; if you are a natural or compulsively peripatetic speaker, your problem is control, so don't get carried away with your own carryings on. The term "natural orator" was also applied by Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 40, to Charles Jefferson (1860-1937) who was also a teacher of oratory which leaves me wondering how a person with a native gift of oratory could be a very effective teacher of oratory to students who lacked such a gift; I suppose only by taking the time and effort to develop knowledge and skill in pedagogy, perhaps even in special education, that is, teaching people who have learning disabilities.

[¶77] **Preachers should give careful consideration to their own sense of presence in the standing pulpit or the preaching chair (*cathedra* – whether stationary or wheeled and the brakes set or not), and to the relationship between the natural and/or the architectural setting and**

their own body language in stance, movements and gestures when they are in the preaching moment.

Long's 2005, 55-56, citation of Brueggemann on the preacher as a scribe, and his reminder that the prophets' bold confrontation of power with truth was not about themselves but about God is instructive here. Let the bold scribe stand in the pulpit before the open Bible and speak the truth with courage, energy, intelligence, imagination, animation and love, for God's sake! Fant and Pinson 1995, II, 239, have a quote of the Puritan preacher Richard Baxter (1615-1691) which indicates that he prepared his sermons meticulously, and insisted on the importance of a forceful and authentic delivery of one's own words as written out. Doing that requires allowing time to practice speaking the sermon as written. Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 7, report that John Watson (1850-1907, pen name: Ian Maclaren, not to be confused with Alexander Maclaren (1820-1910), preached extempore with a manuscript on the pulpit, which seems to me dangerous if not impossible. If a preacher tries this, she had better resolve to never touch that manuscript while preaching, since the result of shuffling through the manuscript for a lost word, phrase, or page could only be disaster. Craddock 2011, 174, presents a more balanced view than his 1983 writing cited above on the use or not of a pulpit. And Long 2005, 239, suggests that preachers give careful consideration to the important symbolism of the pulpit and to the likelihood that the supposed intimacy or closeness created by stepping out of the pulpit may be experienced by some worshipers as threat or intimidation or at best a distraction. Doan 1980, 99, discusses the importance of the integrity of the preacher's body language with the particular text and message of the day. It is instructive that when Ronald Allen 1998, 223-237, writes of "Embodying the Sermon" he frames that chapter as highlighting, 223, "qualities of presence, voice, speaking, and moving *in the pulpit* that can help the sermon engage the congregation" (emphasis added). He

also acknowledges, 230-231, the enhanced sense of freedom and connection with the congregation that some preachers claim for stepping away from the pulpit, but cautions that “freestanding preaching ought not to become an unthinking pattern any more than the unthinking use of a pulpit.” Professor Allen helpfully discusses the preacher’s need to develop a strong sense of presence in the pulpit and in the congregation including an image of oneself in the act of preaching. The recurrent and faddish peer pressure to preach without the aid of notes or pulpit is something that I discuss in Chapter V. If a preacher feels irresistibly impelled by some spirit, holy or human, to depart from the pulpit, let him give prayerful attention to appropriate and inappropriate body language both in the pulpit and out of it, for which consider Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 81-84, 122-126, where the suggested movements of the preacher are designed to portray the drama in the text and not merely to indicate the preacher’s emotional involvement by flailing and parading about. And consider also Haddon Robinson’s 2001, 207-213, discussion of appropriate movement and gestures. But for most occasions, let the preacher decrease by standing in the pulpit or sitting in the preaching chair (*paedicatio cathedra!*), possibly the preacher’s own motorized chair perched at the edge of the dais with the brakes set, so that the gospel message may increase.

[¶78] Does the church fellowship from which the minister emerges and assumes the pulpit or the preaching chair have a need for the preacher to circulate among the people during the worship service? If so, then let the preacher walk or roll among the congregation while collecting the people’s prayer concerns and praise reports. And let him or her return to the altar/table to offer up these sacrifices of petition, intercession, and thanksgiving. I am writing about neighborhood church preaching, not about street preaching or electronic church or mega church preaching. It is true that Jesus is reported to have preached from a hillside, on a beach, from a boat, in the streets,

while walking through the fields, and on the steps of the Temple as well as in the meeting places on sabbath days. But the strolling in-church preachers of early 21st century are not imitators of Jesus nor of the prophets and apostles; they are imitators of the electronic and mega-church preachers, and I find most of these peripatetic mini-church imitators of the mega-church great pretenders to be “peripathetic” in their lame mimicry. Brooks 1989, 127-129, discusses “Two Dangers of Imitation.” I very much favor the practice of conducting portions of the worship service from a position at the altar/table, for, as Ronald Allen 1998, 30, points out, citing Charles L. Rice 1991, 62, collecting and offering the prayers of the people in this manner “can gather the community in such a way as to connect the whole service with the Lord’s Supper.” In a similar vein, I see much value in the worship leader standing at the baptismal font or baptismal pool or elevated baptistry for the greeting, welcome, scriptural sentences, and opening prayer, as a sign that the congregation is assembled as a community of baptized believers, while always including baptized and unbaptized visitors and regular attenders in the words of welcome, including an invitation to preparation for baptism or enrollment as a previously elsewhere baptized person. Barth 1991, 77, asserts: “Preaching that is in conformity with scripture will be modest,” a caution against any action that would push the preacher rather than the Word of God into the limelight. And he, 87, describes the necessary place of preaching as the place of baptism as the sign of grace, the Lord’s Supper as the sign of hope, and Scripture as the record of the truth that is the basis of the church. That seems a good case for a worship setting with the congregation gathered around a very prominent arrangement of pulpit, altar/table and baptismal pool or font. If the preacher must walk around while preaching, let her walk not only among the congregation but also among the furnishings and fixtures that are used for baptism, the Eucharist, and the reading and proclamation of the gospel from the Bible. I am writing to those who strive to preach or hear

the gospel in the remnant churches formerly known as mainstream (not necessarily mainline), those small, medium, and large, rural, suburban, and central city churches where most of the people have thus far bowed only one knee to the Baals—profanation of the church—not both knees like the electronic and mega church preachers and people of the prosperity gospel.

[¶79] On the other hand, Lischer 2001, 76-92, notes approvingly that his own pastor “stands on the pavement in the center of the chancel when he preaches. He doesn’t use this front-and-center position in the church to call attention to himself and his gifts, but to us and ours.” Lischer sees this stance as a move away from a tendency to artificially distance the Word from the people by the use of a pulpit that is large and imposing, perhaps high and lifted up, which fits well with Lischer’s own view of the church’s preaching as all the ways that the church talks to itself in the ongoing process of forming and reforming the church as a faith community, including hymns, readings, prayers, anthems, study groups, various forms of internal and external ministry and mission, and the sermon by the pastor explaining “the meaning of a biblical passage for our life together and our callings in the world.” The minister’s sermon, according to Lischer, 89-90, should often be narrative in form, that is, telling again and again in one way or another the story of God’s salvation activity, which is also the story of the church’s life of faith together. That vision of the proper style and content of the sermon that the pastor preaches brings to mind G. Ernest Wright’s 1952 *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* which emphasizes the narrative style and content of proclamation in the worship patterns of both Israel in the Hebrew Bible and the early church in the New Testament. And Lischer observes that “with the altar behind him and the baptismal font just to the side, he finds it natural to reflect on our baptismal identity or the blessings that we share at the Lord’s table.” And “standing in such close proximity to the pews, our minister’s words seem to arise from the congregation.” And “When he says ‘we,’

he really seems to mean ‘we,’ that is, *us*, the people of God.” I would simply add that it is extremely important in this picture that the chancel is undoubtedly a raised platform in clear view of all in the congregation so that no one has to crane the neck or shift in the pew to see the face of the preacher. And I would hope that if there is a pulpit in the picture, at least the scriptures would have been read from the pulpit Bible and that the arrangement would be such that the minister could return to the pulpit when needed to glance at the scriptural text or the sermon outline, or to retrieve an item to be quoted. Or have so many preachers forgotten that the pulpit and the pulpit Bible are gifts from God to the congregation and symbolize the Bible’s authoritative witness to Christ the living Word and are thus meaningful to the congregation and are respected and treasured by the congregation. Surely the minister who speaks to, for, and as part of the congregation can respect this sentiment by finding the pulpit and the pulpit Bible to be meaningful symbols to be used with respect and appreciation rather than doltishly seeing them only as useless obstacles to be avoided!

[¶79.1] **The integrity of the preacher’s person and the preacher’s message requires attention to a balance between overdoing and underplaying the preacher’s personal experience with the heart of the message received and to be shared in the preaching moment, along with the preacher’s acute sense – both cultivated in attentive pastoral work and sensed in the moment – of the physical and social setting and of the life experience of the people in the present assembly.**

Of course the preacher must not decrease to the point of being a nothing, a fraud or not-a-preacher by doing a public reading of someone else’s sermon! Clues to what Brooks 1989, 27, meant by his definition of preaching as “truth through personality” may be seen in his notation, 19, “The chief function of the minister is to translate speculative truth into personal character and to relate it clearly and practically to daily life” and, 25-43, where he spells out many of the ramifications of

his definition. What Brooks calls personality, we today might term personal character, or use some form of Paul's characterization of being a person in Christ. The preacher *must* do her own work of sermon development. As Willimon 1981, 18, acknowledges, it is elementary that "good preaching must reflect the person of the pastor attempting to communicate the truth of the gospel to the needs of the persons in the congregation." Willimon 2005, 18, explains further that Brooks' definition of preaching as truth through personality "is not only congruent with an incarnational faith in the Word Made Flesh, it also fit nicely in the burgeoning science of psychology and personality development in late-nineteenth-century America." Compare Bultmann's 1957, 146-147, discussion of the dimension of personality and self-understanding in regard to historical life choices and world-views (*Weltanschauungen*) with respect to various views of what recorded history and autobiography may be, in which he cites historians Croce and Collingwood and philosophers Dilthey, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Butterfield, some of whom were near contemporaries of William James and Phillips Brooks. Willimon 2005 has more following the above citation to help us see Brooks' approach in historical and theological perspective. And in the coda of that book, 99-100, Willimon presents a useful counterpoint to Brooks and the incarnational necessity that the message of the preacher's words must be embodied in the preacher's person. He uses God's angelic messengers in Luke's nativity account and a digression on angels by Gregory the Great to remind us that it is the content of the message that gives the company of preachers our significance and not our personalities or our age or gender or educational achievements or ethnic characteristics. Yet, Willimon acknowledges that if the preacher's personality is not in the sermon content and syntax, neither is the truth. For, as Willimon 2005, 17-18, has it, incarnational truth is truth that must be embodied (including in the person of the preacher) in order to be received. Lischer 2001, "ix-x" (Preface, pages not

numbered) cites the research of Edward Farley on the theological *habitus*, or personal quality, of *theologia*, and notes that contemporary homiletics as a whole has largely ignored the preacher's embodiment of *theologia* (God words) in both its personal and communal dimensions.

[¶80] Lischer 2001, 24-25, is careful, in his discussion of the resurrection power to preach and the delicate balancing of the gospel and the preacher's experience, to caution: "We must recognize our bottomless capacity for self-deception in the many subtle ways we subordinate God's story to our own," and use caution and reserve as we comingle our stories with God's story. And he, 27-28, cautions against self-preoccupation in preaching: "If Christian preaching is to have the character of death and resurrection, something in its content and craft must die. The same Paul who wrote 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20), also wrote, 'For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake' (II Cor. 4:5 KJV)." Further along, Lischer, 69-70, when writing about the limits of historical and exegetical research, including archaeological tourism, to bridge the gap between the world of the Bible and the world of the preacher and congregation cautions against overloading sermons with one's research findings, and observes that "the congregation that gives its pastor a trip to the Holy Land pays for it twice." It is instructive that Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a "deep conviction that the Word of God was present always in preaching" and that "even in the poorest attempts from the pulpit, he succeeded in looking for and finding the divine message," and that his only sharp criticisms of his homiletics students at Finkenwalde, and those only in the privacy of individual conferences since his assistant usually presided over the classroom sermon critiques, "were directed toward anything that he regarded as a display of false emotion or a presentation of self rather than the gospel," according to Fant 1975, 115-116, with citations from the collected works of Bonhoeffer in German *Gesammelten*

Schriften, ed. Eberhard Bethge.

[¶81] It is true of course that the extent and manner in which the preacher's personality and emotions may manifest in the preparation and preaching of the sermon will be determined and shaped in large measure by the cultural background and context of the preacher and the congregation. Mitchell 1990, 114-115, asserts that while the elements of some level of personal preaching charisma along with disciplined and careful sermon preparation and the structuring of sermons are essentially the same for the Black church context as for the White church context, there are "various ways in which Black sermons tend to 'do it differently.'" Mitchell, 124-125, discusses the interplay and balance in Black preaching between disciplined and careful preparation and the pulpit charisma so characteristic of Black preaching in terms of "the spontaneity so universally accepted as Black culture's greatest trait." He holds up the example of Black jazz music in which the performance ability to riff improvisationally on a musical theme is preceded by the study and discipline of mastering "the diatonic scale, the instrument, and the theme." And he notes: "When musicians do their thing, creating and playing 'from the bottom of the soul,' they have already practiced the basics for years." Mitchell notes that "the least-informed Black jazz buff can feel the difference if the artist has not done proper preparation and practice." Thus, the preacher of whatever cultural background and context cannot be highly effective if the manifestation of personality displays all the appropriate cultural sounds and gestures without being backed up by disciplined preparation in scriptural interpretation, present awareness of God's church and world, and appropriate homiletic strategy and structuring. Blather is still blather no matter how culturally familiar it may be.

[¶82] And, about the open Bible on the pulpit when the preaching happens in a church meeting house: surprisingly for one acculturated in the Catholic liturgical paradigm, Skudlarek

1981, 92, cites approvingly von Allmen's 1962, 57, stricture against the gesture of shutting the Bible and setting it on a side table after the reading of scripture. And here's a paraphrase of what Karl Barth 1957, 104, says about the preacher standing in the pulpit before an open Bible on Sunday morning: Before her lies the Bible, full of mystery; and before her are seated her more or less numerous hearers, also full of mystery—what indeed is more so?—*What now?* asks the minister (end of paraphrase). Barth, of course, makes it clear that the preacher confronts this situation and question in study and prayer and pastoral work long before entering the pulpit on Sunday morning. Lowry 1997, 105, paints the picture this way, referring both to the preacher in sermon preparation as “scholar in residence” and to the preacher in the middle of the worship service: “The preacher stands facing the text in the name of the congregation and faces the congregation in the name of the text.” On the other hand, Barth, according to Long 2005, 21, demurs from much consideration of the congregation's situation and the communication strategies needed to reach the people with the message of the text. Yet Long, 27-28, acknowledges that in practice, Barth was not so hardnosed an example of the herald model of preaching, 19-28, but that his sermons show him to be a master of rhetoric and an astute reader of his preaching context. Brooks 1989, 130-132, discusses the importance of audience awareness and extemporaneous *writing*. How could a preacher hope to make a credible effort at bridging the divide between the mystery of the Bible and the mystery of the hearers without expounding a biblical passage with the intention of hearing and proclaiming what the Spirit may be saying to this particular church on this day through this particular text (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22)? Borg 2001, 33, and 2003, 58, reports that in the New Zealand Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, the reader says (after reading from the Bible), ‘Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church,’ rather than the traditional *Book of Common Prayer* vesicle ‘This is the Word of the Lord /R/: THANKS BE TO

GOD.’ Stephen Farris, as cited by Long 2005, 128, puts the matter sharply: “The most important task of the interpreter is to ask, ‘What is God doing in the text?’ The most difficult question for the interpreter to answer is, ‘Is God doing anything similar in the world?’” Clearly, these hard questions and tasks don’t confront the preacher unless he begins his sermon development with a Scripture text, notwithstanding that he is not called to preach the Bible but to preach the gospel, that is, to proclaim what the Bible proclaims, or as Long 2005, 136, has it, “the preacher is attempting to bear witness to the truth claims of the gospel that have been heard through a specific biblical text.” When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), it was a very different setting from his message at the sabbath service in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:1-30) where he was handed the Isaiah scroll by the attendant and he interpreted the assigned text with himself in it. But in the Sermon on the Mount, a less formal setting, Jesus clearly had multiple self-assigned texts: the text of the law and the prophets most especially the “teaching of Moses” in the Book of Deuteronomy, the text of the universal wisdom of the ages, the text of certain conventional interpretations and practices of the non-priest scholars of the biblical law (i.e., Scribes and Pharisees—think of popular Bible study group leaders and adult Sunday School class teachers—God bless them one and all! Truly! Where in hell would we be without them? We would be in a worse hell on earth without these gifted, dedicated, and opinionated volunteer wisdom teachers), along with the text of his own knowledge and experience of the life of ordinary people and the most important public issues of the day. Massey 1974, 93-100, in Chapter V, “Insights From the Preaching of Jesus,” makes a strong case for each of the following observations about Jesus’ preaching as exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount:

- *The ability of Jesus to blend preaching and teaching*
- *Jesus the preacher did not deal with generalities but specifics in his preaching.*

- *Jesus did not preach about doing alone, but also about being, and how the two relate.*
- *Jesus blended prophetic and pastoral elements in his preaching.*
- The Sermon on the Mount is also *filled with evangelistic concern.*
- *Jesus preached not only for the church but for the wider world as well.*

[¶83] Donald G. Miller 1957, 24, discusses what it means for the preacher to “bear witness to the unique action of God in Jesus Christ as it is set forth in the record of that action—the Bible—so that the judgment and redemption in those historic deeds become current realities in the soul.” And he insists that it is impossible for a preacher to bear witness to the unique action of God in Jesus Christ apart from an exposition of Scripture. But neither can the preacher proclaim what the Bible proclaims without a pastoral knowledge of the congregation to which he or she is to preach. Such pastoral knowledge can only be gained by actual pastoral work in individual and family visits, counseling, and sharing in fellowship and study groups; not simply by analyzing the congregation sociologically, although that analysis can be helpful as well. Fant and Pinson 1995, VI, 240, report that Alexander Whyte (1836-1921), a preacher and pastor of worldwide fame and distinguished professor in New College, Edinburgh, and widely read author, considered conscientious pastoral work including home visitation, an essential element of good preaching and once advised “Set every invitation and opportunity aside in the interest of a good conscience toward the homes of your people.” Many factors can serve as barriers to “routine” home visitation. One obstacle that may loom larger than all others combined is a pastor’s own psychological barrier to the self-starter, outside-salesman discipline of making pastoral visits other than as chaplain to congregants confined to hospital beds or residing in nursing care centers. And even in the matter of hospital visits to congregants, especially for those of us who missed out on clinical pastoral education, there can be an awkward confusion about how to conduct oneself.

One of my many youthful flubs was to pass the visitation time at the hospital bedside in small talk and omit the obvious pastoral sign of the healing touch and spoken prayer—until called out on this matter by a family member of a patient. Reinhold Niebuhr confessed in *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (1929) that in the beginning of his thirteen-year pastorate at the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit he sometimes walked by a congregant's house three times while summoning the courage to approach and ring the doorbell or knock. But he grew over time - with discipline, courage, and a true sense of a pastoral calling - to love every aspect of his pastoral duties, which made his eventual transition to full-time academia and writing a “parting of such sweet sorrow.” And it is well known that his sermons were pastoral mainly in the prophetic sense of boldly exposing the systemic injustices of the prevailing industrial and governmental structures of his community, nation, and world. But what congregation or parish could have sustained or would have tolerated such preaching for 13 years if the prophet had not also been a beloved and lovingly attentive pastor? That was no mere human relations accommodation or political trade off. Rather, the pastoral listening was a necessary part of giving the minister the language and sensibility that were needed to preach prophetically and pastorally at the same time. (with reporting by Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 341-396).

[¶84] Yet, there are cultural, economic, and societal characteristics that are very different in the early 21st century from what they were in the early 20th century:

- Some pastors may be inhibited by their training as a psychological counselor, a stricture against initiating a private personal consultation such as in a pastor-initiated home visit, rather than requiring congregant-initiated appointments or announcing open consultation, hours for any who wish to “drop in;”
- Due to privacy concerns hospital patient registries are no longer posted publicly, so that a

pastor may not know that a congregant is hospitalized unless notified by the patient; or by a friend or family member or the hospital's chaplaincy staff with the permission of the patient;

- The prevalence of two-income families among congregants and pastors, often with staggered work schedules, means that the time available for home visits is greatly constricted;
- Coaching and transportation duties of parents for after-school activities along with other after-hours community involvements of congregants and pastors;
- The busy pastor syndrome, i.e., busy with everything except honest sermon preparation and earnest pastoral visiting;
- The fact that the unannounced appearance of the pastor or anyone else at the door is not ordinarily welcomed in contemporary society.

It is good that some pastors have learned to make use of small groups and other informal settings and various individual encounters other than home visits to hear people's concerns, needs, and perspectives, not only in the function of pastoral care but also in the pastoral grounding of sermon preparation. Samuel Shoemaker (1893-1963), well known for his emphasis on personal evangelizing witness as a responsibility of every Christian, also emphasized the importance of pastoral listening as a necessary element in sermon preparation, and he made use of every individual encounter as well as the small group ministries that he instituted in support of his own sermon preparation, according to Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 58-76. Thus, home visitation is certainly not the only way to do priestly listening. Yet there *are* people at home sometimes, especially retirees, widows, convalescents, shut-ins, etc. And what a boon is the mobile phone! When you finish a visit in a certain neighborhood you can call someone else in the same quadrant

to find out if this would be a convenient time for a pastoral visit. Bonhoeffer 1975, 177, in his 11th and final lecture in the 1930's series on homiletics, entitled "After the Sermon," advises that the pastor should spend some time Sunday evenings remembering the members of the congregation, his partners in ministry, in prayer, for "The preached message will provide an important basis for the work among the congregation during the following week, in conversations and in pastoral care. Just as the sermon grows heavily out of the pastor's work among the congregation, it also provides opportunity for work among the congregation to be developed out of it." Of course, as mentioned above, there is no need to revive the awkward but formerly welcomed old custom of knocking on doors or ringing doorbells unannounced. The pastor with a telephone in her pocketbook can call and ask if this might be a convenient time for a pastoral visit. If a member of the congregation is ill, recently bereaved, or living alone, no other reason or motivation is needed for arranging a home visit, and the reason need not be stated in arranging a convenient time for a visit unless the congregant/parishioner asks why? Once the visit is underway, the parishioner/congregant will usually direct the conversation according to his or her interests and needs. Trust the congregant/parishioner to provide openings for you the pastor/priest to make the visit a time of spiritual counsel rather than merely passing the time of day in small talk. It is probably not advisable to ask the open-ended question, "What did you think about Sunday's sermon?" But I have known ministers who found it useful to be prepared to ask specific questions about a particular issue that was mentioned in a recent sermon or that was being discussed in church councils, fellowship/study groups, and service teams. Willimon 1981, 25, has a lengthy quotation of James Cleland 1954, 73-74, which concludes with "that is why pastoral visitation is a *sine qua non* of helpful preaching."

[¶85] Ronald Allen 1998, 21-43, discusses "The Church as a Context for Preaching" and

cites Leander Keck 1978, 61, 64, on the importance of “priestly listening” by ministers doing sermon preparation. He also notes that preachers, whether pastors in their own congregations, or guest ministers, or principal preachers at ecclesiastical conclaves, must attend to the social context in which they are to proclaim the gospel, and supplies examples of such audience analysis or “exegesis” of the congregation in the final section of the book, “Case Studies of Sample Sermons.” Long 2005, 1-10, 65, citing Jurgen Moltmann and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eschews the over used “exegeting the congregation,” or analyzing its subculture, in favor of the preacher’s identifying with the congregation by remembering that he or she is called from among the congregation to stand and speak as one of the people, that is, one who identifies with the congregation yet can perceive the dimensions of its life from external social and cultural perspectives. One of the implications of this stance is, as Long explains, 100-101, that the preacher does not move in sermon development from exegeting the text to “exegeting” the congregation because “the congregation and their cultural context have already been present throughout the exegesis of the text. Mitchell 1990, 14-15, discusses the culture of a Black church or any church as the given medium but not the whole content of the preaching message. He points out that efforts to amend the culture of a church tradition in preaching and worship style or to make a frontal attack on the larger cultural setting of a church tends to be counterproductive of church vitality, growth, and societal relevance. Further along, Mitchell, 106-108, has a section on ‘Dialogue and Social Distance,’ in which he notes that “In the Black preaching enterprise the preacher’s preparation starts with close identity with the congregation.” And he observes that historically in the Black church “Whether chosen from the ranks of the membership (as often occurred) or not, the preacher was allowed no social distance from the people. For, “as a Black, one could not escape having a part in their condition even if one wanted to.” Barth 1991, 20-25,

acknowledges that Schleiermacher's approach of listening both to the text and to the present feelings and concerns of the congregation can help the preacher avoid the paradox of the minister becoming an autocrat, that is, 21, "the speaker's awareness, when speaking, of emerging from the congregation, the absolutely republican city of God, and of returning to the congregation when finished...protects the speaker against the arrogance of acting officially in virtue of vocation." But, of course, Barth, 22-23, thinks that Schleiermacher goes too far toward obscuring the Word of God in "this immanent sea of feelings." Yet, Barth, reflecting the older Schleiermacher's differentiation between the preacher as the organ of the church at large and the preacher as the organ of the congregation, 22, and his own embrace of both perspectives, spells out practically for the work of sermon preparation and preaching the foundational significance of the notion and awareness that the preacher is called into ministry from the congregation, 66, continues to live out a history with the congregation while in the service of the Word, 84-85, and wrestles with a text in sermon preparation in the context of a church whose unity is embodied in the mutuality of preacher and congregation, 112-117. Craddock 2011, 123, joins in articulating the power of speaking for the church and not just to the church in his chapter "Preaching and the Nod of Recognition." Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 127, reprising Allen 1998, 21-43, cited above, note the importance of preachers being priestly listeners to the life of the congregation as they seek to discern the most appropriate homiletic model for each occasion, and in particular whether an occasion calls for "verse by verse" exposition. Lischer 2001, 70-71, includes in his discussion of "Preaching begins with hearing the voice of God" the necessity of also hearing the voice of the people, citing Isaiah 50:4, "The prophet interprets his own ability to speak in the context of listening when he says 'The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens

my ear to hear as those who are taught.’”

[¶86] Forbes 1989, 61-62, 64, dramatizes the dynamic tuning to both God and the people during sermon preparation: “To preach under the anointing of the Holy Spirit is to preach, recognizing, ‘Lord, I don’t know what to say unless you tell me what to say. If you don’t tell me, I can do a little exegesis and I can say some words. But if you don’t speak to me, I will not know.’” Then Forbes, 64, makes clear that the preacher can only hear God’s answer to that prayer by listening to the people:

To be anointed preachers is to understand and for us to listen to the people in our culture and in our world. We must listen to the black folk, the white folk, the poor folk, the rich folk. We need to know what marginal folk are saying, what corporate rulers are saying. To preach requires divine discernment of what all of these people are saying. You can’t preach if you don’t know what the folks are saying, not only with their mouths, but with the conditions of their lives...Part of sermon preparation process is that you have to know what the Lord is saying to YOU about what the people are saying. Then you can hear what God has to say, and that always is a word of hope as well as judgment. The power of the anointed preacher is to be able to hear the word of God, and to know that that word is the word that brings life in the midst of death. My prayer in this discussion is that somebody will decide, “Lord, if that’s the ministry to which you are calling me, I dare not go without your anointing.”

Craddock 2010, 25-27, discusses the preaching implications of treating the listening congregation as participants and not just recipients of the preaching event. And Lischer 2001, 76-92, discusses the implications of defining the church’s preaching as all the ways that the church talks to itself about the gospel in an ongoing process of formation as a community of faith, of which the pastor’s sermon is just *one* of those ways. The importance of the congregation’s partnership with the preacher in sermon development is also discussed in von Allmen 1962, 51; Niedenthal and Rice 1980, 5; Steimle 1980, 170; and Willimon 1981, 17-18. All of these discussions make clear that the congregation is not subordinate to the preacher. But, of course, the congregation *is* called to respect the *office* of preaching, as Bonhoeffer acknowledges in *Ethics* (259 in the S.C.M. 1955 edition and 293 in the Macmillan Paperback Edition 1965, 1975) according to Fant 1975, 32-35.

[¶87] **The preacher's personal experience with the message of the text and his or her pastoral knowledge of the life circumstances of the present assembly must not be allowed to overwhelm the function of the scripture text and the preacher's exegetical work in developing the message and structuring the shape of the sermon.**

Pastoral knowledge of the congregation to be addressed need not be the controlling consideration in devising a homiletic strategy and structure for the sermon, as in the project method or problem-solving or therapeutic approach of Fosdick or the life situation approach of Sockman and their ilk. Bonhoeffer 1975, 127, insisted that the primary work that Christ wants to do through our preaching is to sustain the reality of unity and of mutual support and care, i.e., community, in the congregation, not to give personal advice or solve corporate problems. During his brief sojourn in the United States, he was singularly underwhelmed by the popular problem-solving preachers that he heard, as reported in Fant 1975, 13-14. As noted above, Sloyan 1984, 40, asserts that the key to preaching biblically from a lectionary text is the mystery of life in Christ, his life in the assembly. Allen and Springsted 2007, 196, note that the philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) "is most responsible for the development of mystery, which is contrasted with problems. We seek solutions for problems. When a solution is found, the problem disappears. But in the case of encountering mystery, there is no 'solution.' Instead, one participates in a mystery. The more one is open to a mystery, the more one learns through participation in it and the more its depths are revealed." If the needs of the congregation, or the world, completely dominate the sermon development to the point of ignoring or obscuring the intention of the appointed text, then one has drifted from expository preaching and into topical, subject, thematic, or situational preaching; not to mention drifting dangerously close to the edge of misconstruing or abusing the intention of the text.. Ronald Allen 1998, 52, citing sociological studies in Roof and McKinney 1987 and Witten

1993, discusses, in a section on “Preaching as the Church Moves from the Mainline to the Margins,” how the increasing prevalence of the therapeutic model in the “mainline” Protestant churches has accelerated their decline and complicated the task of recovering the proclamation of the “transcendent, majestic, awesome God of Luther and Calvin – whose image informed early Protestant visions of the relationship between human beings and the divine.” Buttrick 1987, 405-426, discusses both the hazards of the therapeutic model and the possibility of situational preaching that is responsive to the symbols of divine revelation in scripture, which he calls preaching in the mode of praxis. As his father, George, 1931, 147, wrote when son David was only three or four years old, “Beginning with the Bible, true expository preaching will carry it to life. But if we begin with life, we shall end with Bible...,” cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 261. Lischer 2001, 9, states that preaching from the here and now situation in light of Scripture and the coherent center of the gospel of grace and promise is not entirely different from preaching from a biblical text in relation to present situation and the coherent center of the gospel of grace and promise (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 12]). Barth 1991, 50, asserts that “It is dangerous even to address a specific congregational situation or experience in terms of a specific text. In such situations we must bring the Bible as a whole to bear.” Of course, it is well known that the whole Bible should be kept in mind when interpreting a specific text in any way. Haddon Robinson 2001, 56-58, proposes that when a preacher chooses to preach on a theological subject or a life situation or a public issue, one or two relevant scripture passages should be allowed to guide the sermon development on the basis of sound exegesis (which includes respect for the whole Bible context of the selected passages) in order to produce a hybrid which he calls “Topical Exposition.” Ronald Allen 1998, 113-117, discusses possibilities and limitations of “Topical Preaching as a Supplement to Expository Preaching,” observing that situations and issues in the

life of the congregation, the local community, the larger church, or the world might call for a sermon that addresses a particular Christian teaching or practice, or an area of personal need or situation, or a current social matter. Davis 1958, 127-137, discusses therapeutic speech as one category of functional discourse in both scripture and preaching and provides an extensive list of New Testament texts that have a therapeutic intention.

[¶88] Willimon 2005, 44, may be correct in tagging the therapeutic model or the anthropological focus of much modern preaching as partaking of the Pelagian heresy (denial of original sin; contending that humans have perfect freedom to choose good or evil, do right or do wrong). But I think that Willimon, 43, borders on a kind of biblicism (I discussed biblicism extensively in Chapter III) when he asserts that the Bible always speaks primarily about God. I think rather that when we read the Bible in faith, God always speaks to us about life. Yet, there is scriptural warrant, in Hebrews 4:12 for example, for personifying the Bible as Willimon does. Preachers who are serious about setting forth the message and intention of the appointed or selected text of the day will be careful to avoid a persistent strategy of loosely using, adapting, or associating the text to address some current personal coping issue or struggle such as can be seen in the popular preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), reviewed and highlighted in Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 1-70, and that of Samuel Shoemaker (1893-1963), reviewed and sampled in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 55-106, not to mention the singular psychological mantra preacher Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993) “The Power of Positive Thinking,” reviewed in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 219-262, and Peale’s more-pompous-than-Peale “Possibility Thinking” clone, Robert Schuller (1926-2015). But the serious preacher may also keep in mind the psychological case for a biblical faith in God as a foundation of one’s own personal well-being, a case famously made by the preacher-psychologist Leslie Weatherhead (1893-1976) and reviewed

by Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 101-119; and the philosophical case for the same, which is well made by Diogenes Allen 1989, where he discusses the notion of a hopeful philosophical seeker finding one's own well-being by recognizing and accepting the good that God has for one. The serious biblical preacher may find further and deeper exploration of the life of the human spirit by a renown Christian theologian who deliberately chooses to write on this subject using psychological and philosophical terms and categories rather than the conventional language of church teaching and biblical theology, namely Tillich 1963 [a], especially PART IV. LIFE AND THE SPIRIT, 11-294. Tillich acknowledges the notice and criticism that he has received for structuring his Systematic Theology throughout the two earlier volumes in the language and categories of psychology and philosophy in the Introduction of Volume Three, p. 4, where he defends his choice as follows: "This procedure seems more suitable for a systematic theology which tries to speak understandably to the large group of educated people, including open-minded students of theology, for whom traditional language has become irrelevant." And he acknowledges the danger of his approach (throwing the baby out with the bathwater) but affirms that "Dangers are not a reason for avoiding a serious demand" (making the baby more attractive with filtered or freshly scented bath water?).

[¶89] **The most effectual preaching can only happen as a mutual engagement in intercessory prayer of the people for the preacher and of the preacher for the people.**

Farley 1996, 172-175, discusses preaching the (symbolic and, therefore, age-defying) "world of the gospel" as an alternative to the bridge paradigm, referenced more fully in Chapter III. And, of course, it is not possible to proclaim what the Bible proclaims unless one also prays for and receives the help of the Holy Spirit who inspired the writings. And even that proclamation will

not be effectual unless the congregation prays the Spirit's help for the preacher and for themselves. Deiss 1976, 287, cites the spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, of the early church in support of his affirmation that preacher and people must pray for the help of the Holy Spirit if we are to meet God in the interpretation and proclamation of God's word, and he notes that "Origen himself did not hesitate to stop in the middle of his homily and ask his hearers: 'Help me with your prayer so that I may really speak God's word to you'"—call-and-response! (also cited above [¶ 16]). The production of such pastoral, Spirit led, expository sermons by pastor and people may or may not be helped by the use of sermon seminars and sermon response groups involving people of the congregation, on which see von Allmen 1962, 52, Steimle 1980, 169-170; Willimon 1981, 29-30; and Swank 1981, 57-62. I recount my own experience with such groups in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

One Pilgrim's Progress – My Own Story:

Reflections on My Journey in Expository Preaching, Concluding with my Final Four Sermon Scripts Illustrating Four Basic Sermon Forms

Reader Alert: This chapter contains some woulda'-coulda'-shoulda' regrets, recriminations and what-ifs.

Here, I venture to share a brief summary of this pilgrim's progress in the work of preaching expository sermons at Sunday morning worship services. The first year of weekly preaching turned into quite a mad and maddening scramble. Sermons previously prepared as assignments for homiletics classes and practiced on student supply preaching jobs were quickly exhausted. Then came sermons for Stewardship Sunday, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Then a quick series on the main themes in the book of Acts, based on an elective seminary course in English Bible. Next: a smattering of Lent and Easter followed by a quick overview series on selected passages in Paul's letter to the Romans, and then – utter exhaustion. Of course, I was aware of the liturgical year, my first homiletics professor, George Miles Gibson, having published two books on it. But, somehow, I had never seriously considered using the two-year Sunday morning and evening lectionary in our *Book of Common Worship* 1946. Then, in desperation, I pulled a book off my shelf that got me through the next few months of preaching, *The Symphony of the Christian Year* by Randolph Crump Miller, an Episcopalian church educator. Here was a kind of thematic and catechetical look at the liturgical year that was much more helpful to me than simply the list of readings in the lectionary itself. That got me through the next few months but did not furnish enough sermon fodder for a second round of the liturgical year.

[¶2] So, after a couple of years of such thrashing around I resolved to take a serious run at preaching expositively through a whole book of the Bible. It appears that my stuttering progress toward continuous expository preaching is not an uncommon experience among beginning preachers. Barth 1991, 91-93, acknowledged that common phenomenon in his preaching seminars when he described the young preacher's arrival at the oasis of expository preaching after passing through the desert, having quickly or eventually exhausted the accumulated backlog of personal resources and acquired wisdom in theological essays and sermons prepared as seminary class assignments. But, according to Barth, 92-93, the oasis of scriptural exposition is not only a welcome sight to the young preacher who has run out of theological juice, it is the only food source and food service that can truly satiate the congregation's spiritual hunger: "The first step in preparing a sermon is thus to realize that we must seek the material for it exclusively in the Old Testament and the New. This alone is the material that we must proclaim to the congregation, for as the community of Jesus Christ it is waiting for the food of holy scripture, and nothing else." I did not know the term *lectio continua* or as I now prefer *lectio continua de scriptura*. I gathered about five or six scholarly commentaries on the Gospel According to Matthew and soon established a regular discipline of study and preparation. I used the division and subject headings of the commentaries to help me mark off the consecutive preaching pericopes. This was done inclusively, that is, no verses were skipped. Then for three or four mornings each week I devoted about an hour each to the text for the Sundays three weeks out, two weeks out, and next. I prayerfully and expectantly studied the text and the several commentaries in rotation, making notes of any features or observations that seemed illuminating or promising at the moment. I continued in this cycle over a period of days and weeks until I had read each commentary on the passage several times, allowing the text and the commentators to talk to each other and to me and

allowing myself to question and talk back to them in my unorganized jottings and note taking. I came to value and characterize this study process in my own mind as if I were participating in a round table or panel discussion with those I considered the greatest published Scripture scholars of the time. I made the scripture commentators and other theological writers key partners in my conversational process of sermon preparation. Johnson 1999, 270, notes that “For the Pharisaic tradition in which Paul was schooled, midrash was always a communal activity. It was how teacher and students engaged the text of Torah.” So, when I go round and round with the commentators, it is one student and several teachers rather than one master and several disciples, a kind of communal midrash with the teacher-student ratio reversed and the master teachers being present by proxy—on the printed page (also referenced below [¶ 28] and in Chapter III [¶ 9]). Ronald Allen 1998, 63-150, discusses theology, interpretation, sermon preparation, and preaching as conversation; which I referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 17]. Long 2005, 95, citing Bernard W. Anderson, characterizes this process as consulting “a community of interpretation, a scholarly seminar on the biblical text,” and, as I note below, he insists and explains why this panel of experts should not be consulted until one has done a number of preliminary exegetical tasks. But my approach was to cut directly to the low speed chase with multiple commentators converging on our target text.

[¶3] One benefit of using the text and the commentators in this way is that the objective part of the hermeneutic circle is inevitably honored and allowed to function, that is, understanding the text in relation to its historical and canonical (whole Bible) contexts and understanding these contexts in relation to the text at hand. Bultmann 1957, 111-112, discusses that objective aspect of the hermeneutic circle in a chapter on the nature of history. He also discusses the subjective aspect of the hermeneutic circle which takes account of what the interpreter brings to the task, a

discussion that I see as commensurate with Gadamer's 1986 concept of the "fusion of horizons," that of the text and that of the reader described by Allen and Springsted 2007, 204-205, so that not only is the text interpreted by the reader but the reader is interpreted by the text. It was my intention in this process to listen to the text both as a knowing student of modern biblical scholarship and as a person of faith open to being addressed by God concerning the present situation, i.e., Karl Barth's approach as described by Craddock 1983, 113-114. There is some similarity between this process of study and what Killinger 1996, 72-76, describes as brainstorming and the sermon development work that Davis 1958, 37, refers to as studying the text and amassing one's notes in order to come up with a generative idea for sermon development. Another image and a question for the process of the preacher's round after round of wrestling with text and commentators are drawn from the writers' room where sketches of scripts and casts of characters are developed for television dramas or video game stories. The question: Can the principal writer (preacher) and her co-writers (text and commentaries) develop a kind of group consciousness as they process the possibilities for a script (sermon sketch)? It seems to me in retrospect that I must have stumbled onto the hermeneutical process of interpreting the text from the perspective of my horizon and then allowing the text to interpret me from the perspective of its horizon and thus to modify me and my horizon and my interpretation of the text, and so on, forth and back and back and forth, that is, the "hermeneutical circle" and the "fusion of horizons" as well as the give-and-take in the television writers' room mentioned above. Ronald Allen 1996, 180-182, has a discussion of "Conversation as a Way of Rethinking the Relationship of the Preacher and the Text" and a note where he mentions a book *The Round Table Pulpit* by John McClure.

[¶4] My idea was to force feed my mind in the text and the commentators until something

of my own thoughts and my own take on the text began to emerge in my own words, couched in my own analogies and frames of reference coming out of my own knowledge and experience of God and of the world and the people to whom I would preach. I did not know it but my purpose and method were consistent with the following citations of Karl Barth reported by Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 101: “The preacher ‘who does not himself speak as one who has himself been made alive from the dead cannot truly preach to men,’” and “Preaching then becomes a matter of telling the hearers ‘what God himself has to say to them, by explaining, in his own words, a passage from Scripture which concerns them personally.’” Sherer 1944, 186-192, as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 305, discusses the importance of the preacher’s own speaking style: “Style is not some mysterious something you acquire only after years of laborious and painstaking effort; style is merely the way you have of expressing yourself.” But, according to Fant and Pinson, Sherer did believe in *improving* the way one expresses oneself. And they record Sherer’s description...of what he meant by the four principles of style that he recommended to the preachers in his audience: “1. Select truthful words... 2. Select simple words... 3. Select picturesque words... 4. Select words that give clarity.” Part of my strategy was to study and live and work and play until something of my own self-expression, by which I meant my own syntax, style, or manner of expressing my sense of Gods’ message, began to emerge. Long 2005, 47, expresses the matter in better terms than self-expression; self-expression being a term that I learned late in life has philosophical connotations connected with early 19th century romanticism. Here’s what Long wrote: “When the preacher prepares a sermon by wrestling with a biblical text, the preacher is not merely gathering information about that text. The preacher is listening for a voice, looking for a presence, hoping for the claim of God to be encountered through the text. Until this happens there is nothing for the preacher to say. When it happens, the preacher becomes

a witness to what has been seen and heard through the Scripture, and the preacher's authority grows out of this seeing and hearing" (also referenced below [¶ 33]). Massey 1974, 53, wrote:

A soundly biblical sermon demands a valid hermeneutical base. It demands a "meeting" between the preacher and the Voice in the passage he examines; and it demands full meditation on the message from that Voice. Only thus does a sermon properly grow and take on maturity for its task.

That statement at the beginning of Massey's chapter on responsible hermeneutics in sermon development is expanded, 86-88, in his chapter on responsible homiletics in sermon development, under three headings: a meeting between the preacher and the Voice in the text, dialogical meditation on what is heard from the Voice in the text, and remaining under the management of the Word of God in which the Divine Voice is heard. One form of such dialogic meditation on the Divine Voice that the preacher hears in the text, is a notion of Paul Tillich's that Massey, 87, cites from *The Shaking of the Foundations*, that is, Tillich's theological Method of Correlation. Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 52, report that Tillich in both his systematic theology and in his preaching used what he called The Method of Correlation (*Systematic Theology, Volume I*, 59-66) by explaining the contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence. I take it that existential questions can be addressed to ordinary people in everyday language. In a similar manner, Massey 1980, 55, cites Morgan Phelps Noyes (1891-1972) to the effect that in addition to what the preacher gains by the strenuous work of wrestling with text and world, the preacher must also receive that which comes as a gift in the midst of the text, the world, and the wrestling.

[¶5] A number of homiletic theologians emphasize the importance of contextualizing or recontextualizing when discussing the message of scriptural texts, by which they mean using language that has clear, everyday, concrete referents in the here and now. Barth 1991, 101, wrote "Above all..., the point is to be an echo for the call of God that comes to us in his Word." Lischer

2001, ix (Preface, pages not numbered) wrote that the genius of preaching lies in the discovery of the witness to Jesus Christ in the text and that this discovery “occurs amidst prayer, struggle, and exegesis, in a moment of theological insight.” Barbara Brown Taylor 1999, 93 and 2001, 157, wrote that the process of sermon preparation includes discovering for oneself some connections between the text and the preaching situation, finding one’s own words for communicating that discovery, both of which can dawn in a moment of revelation or insight (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 29.a.]). Those three 21st century witnesses, Lischer, Long, and Taylor, seem to echo Barth’s 1991, 88-89, discussion in his homiletics seminars of the 1930’s under the heading of “Originality:” There Barth stresses the indispensable practice of personal piety and devotion, including a routine of daily Bible reading and prayer in those who would prepare and speak expository sermons: “If specific individuals undertake the exposition of scripture, they must themselves have been listening previously to scripture, and they must listen to it over and over again, and do so in a very personal repentance and thankfulness before God. Only in this way can they break through to a free word about scripture...In other words, holy scripture first has to break through to them. Only then are they in a position to echo it with their own words and their own thinking.” I venture to hope that when that voice is heard and that moment of theological insight or revelation by the Spirit of God happens, then the power of Christ’s resurrection has reasserted itself in the preacher’s faith consciousness, so that the preacher is newly alive as a preacher and not merely trying to cobble something together for the Sunday sermon. For, as Lischer, 28-29, indicates, while the preacher may have found something to *say*, there can be a deeper reason for a preacher having nothing to *preach* than simply failing to press on in sermon preparation to a moment of theological insight or hearing a voice, and that is theological ambivalence with respect to the resurrection of Christ and our hope of resurrection in Christ:

“...If Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe” and “If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 19 TEV). The spiritual power of these words is not reduced but enhanced for the existentialist-leaning preacher for whom “this life” means life in the world when resurrection faith is absent or dormant and “eternal life” means life in the world when resurrection faith is vital. And Lischer, 70, in his discussion of “What Makes Preaching Possible,” wrote, “Preaching begins with hearing the voice of God. Robert Funk (1966, 7) writes with great wisdom, ‘He who aspires to the enunciation of the word must first learn to hear it; and he who hears the word will have found the means to articulate it.’”

Bonhoeffer 1975, 131-134, in lecture number 3, “The Witnesses,” of his series on homiletics insists that the pastor’s witness in preaching is derivative, in a line of succession from the witness of God, the witness of the Holy Spirit, the witness of Christ, the witness of the apostles, and the witness of Scripture, and must not be merely a spontaneous or self-expressive witness to the preacher’s personal faith experience. The preacher as witness to Christ must submit to the discipline of Scripture. Bonhoeffer, 133, sees the temptation to use the text as a springboard for our own thoughts as a constant struggle with demons. Therefore, the preacher must be constantly reliant on the help of Christ who went to hell and back to defeat the prince of demons. *Christus Victor!* (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 90]). Barth 1991, 115-116, cautions that a preacher’s initial ideas for discussing the text in relation to contemporary life should be put through a “second filter” by way of reexamining one’s own words in light of another rereading of the text. Keller 2015, 208, writes of the “remarkable mixture of humility and boldness all at once of John the Baptist in becoming a voice. John, of course, first heard a voice before he became one.

[¶6] Thinking about my process in Long’s terms: I wrestled with text and commentaries

and life and world until I heard a voice – and found my “self-expression.” Of course, when I hear a voice and find mine, I am blessed by the text with which I have been wrestling, as Catherine Robinson 1996, 32, puts it in an appropriate allusion to Jacob’s all-night wrestling with God’s messenger in Genesis 32:22-32. Here I use the term self-expression in the sense of presenting my own thoughts, observations, feelings, and information in my own words. Allen and Springsted 2007, 22-23, report that Socrates’ point in confounding a student who answered a question by quoting a poet is not that what the poet said is necessarily incorrect but that the person whose education consists of learning what others have said does not necessarily arrive at knowledge. A similar distinction in the field of classical music performance is discussed in Langer 1993, 221-225 (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 31]), which I paraphrase here: While music is thought of as a “language of feeling,” the performer is not engaged in “self-expression” but in *exposition* (setting forth, not explaining, which I discussed in Chapter IV [especially ¶s 29, 30, 31]) of feelings, not feelings that the composer may have had at a certain time but rather the composer’s knowledge of feelings that may be attributed to characters in the drama or story that the music portrays, and that may be universal. Nevertheless, the feelings must resonate and be internalized in the artist both in preparation and in performance if they are to resonate and be aroused in the audience. Preaching from the Bible may be something like performing a classical music composition. But I think the preacher must be engaged in both the exposition, setting forth another’s—the Spirit’s, the biblical writer’s—message, and in self-expression, answering a Voice in one’s own voice.

[¶7] I do not use the term self-expression in reference to the self-expressivism of the Romantic movement which Keller 2015, 276, n. 35, references and indicates that it can and has led to political irresponsibility and abuses such as Fascism. And I do not use the term self-

expression in the philosophical sense of Robert Bellah's "expressive individualism" which Keller 2015, 133, calls "the sovereign self." And neither do I use the term self-expression in the sense of the expressive model of language discussed by Buttrick 1987, 177-179, which he acknowledges is necessary but insufficient in preaching which "is inevitably concerned with historical language."

The homiletic theology expressed in Farmer 1942, Chapter III, "Preaching as Personal Encounter" cannot be honored, I am convinced, if I do not study in sermon preparation to arrive at my own self-expression. My meaning is akin to what Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) 1989, 26, meant when he wrote that "preaching is the bringing of truth through personality," and akin to Karen Stokes' 2001, 36, use of Brooks' definition in her own preaching standards; and akin to what Don Wardlaw 1983, 17-18, meant when he wrote that the straitjacket of discursive argument has been a hindrance to the preacher's lively self-expression; and akin to Gardner Taylor's 1983, 138, reminder of how enormously each preacher's personality influences his or her take on the scriptures and, consequently, both the substance and the structuring of each minister's sermons.

Bonhoeffer 1975, ed. Fant, 168-175, in a section headed "Language in Worship," has some useful reflections on genuine subjectivity in the preacher's tone, and some cautions about several kinds of false subjectivity. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 114, citing Bethge 1961, note that Bonhoeffer advised against developing a preaching style but acknowledged that styles are unavoidable.

Donald G. Miller's 1957, 51-52, discussion of how each preacher's unique gifts, experience, and creativity kick in after extensive exegetical study in sermon preparation contains this observation: "The creative impulses of each (preacher)...will be moving firmly within the control of the thought of the biblical writers." Miller's final chapter on "atmosphere" for "re-creating the mood" of the text, 142-153, surely makes it evident that releasing one's own native gifts of imagination—getting intimately involved in the mood of the passage of scripture, meditating on

the text and absorbing its atmosphere—requires a longer lead time in sermon preparation than one five-day work week. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 75, give an example of how the very different youthful paths of receptive faith development in Chrysostom and long resistance followed by dramatic conversion experience in Augustine inevitably influenced the shape and emphases of their preaching. Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843) was a consummate craftsman in his scholarship and sermon writing and he had a winsome personality according to Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 264-266, but the true basis of his effectiveness was his exemplary life which consistently shown through in his preaching, and “His life found such eloquent expression through his sermons that great crowds filled the church when he preached.” McCheyne was well aware of the temptation of preaching to the applause, and once prayed “May God keep me from preaching myself instead of Christ crucified.”

[¶8] The issue here is not merely the self-expression or personality of the preacher but rather the integrity of message and messenger. Fant and Pinson 1995, II, 144, summarize, citing Leroy Nixon 1950, 58, John Calvin’s perspective on the necessity of the preacher’s personal integrity with his message in relationship with God: “He must ‘ratify and seal in effect the doctrine he bears,’ and show that what he says ‘he has so conceived in his heart, and has it so printed and engraved in him, that it is as though he spoke before God’” (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 33]). Craddock 2010, 23-24, observes that “all preaching is to some extent self-disclosure by the preacher,” and advises that “If preaching discloses self even when we are preaching Christ and not ourselves, then let the one revealed be that growing self which week after week probes scripture, tradition, experience and the human condition and shapes for the listeners an appropriate word.” But he also discusses “The Language of Preaching,” 196-199, and makes clear that the preacher’s language must be calculated to effect the hearer’s reception of the gospel and

not merely to exhibit the speaker's knowledge, experience, and opinions or to vent their feelings. And he lists ten disciplined habits and practices by which preachers can build their capacity to put self-expression at the service of gospel proclamation and hearing. That certainly does not suggest that Craddock's inductive/narrative approach, when used as intended, would lead to "private parables in the name of self-expression," a supposed danger that Long 2005, 104, attributes to Ronald Sleeth. The first source of the "General Materials of the Sermon" discussed in Broadus and Weatherspoon, 76-93, is "Inventive Production," which is what later writers would call the creative process. Such self-expression is also described, 83-86, as "relative originality." Massey 1974, 80, mentions "an aptness for invention" as one of the personal qualities in a preacher that can help make a sermon live and can contribute to effective sermon delivery. I take "invention" to mean self-expression in the sense of finding one's own voice by doing one's own thinking and using one's own manner of speaking.

[¶9] Craddock 2011, 65-115, has five chapters on "The Sermon as a Twice-Told Tale" in which he explores various dimensions of what is involved in what I mean by self-expression as I begin to find my own voice to "imitate" the spirit of the gospel that I am receiving anew in my sermon preparation studies, especially Chapter 7 which is subtitled "What is a 'Twice Told Tale'?" The effectiveness for the hearers comes in the moment of recognition when the preacher's telling is recognized as resonating with what they have previously experienced, that is, as another telling of a familiar tale, which is, paradoxically, not likely to happen if the preacher is using another's telling rather than developing his or her own, that is, achieving self-expression. Craddock observes that the joy of such a moment of recognition is a more appropriate or promising expectation of the worship and preaching experience for a life-long Christian than a possible new and life-changing conversion experience. And Swank 1981, 59, affirms that the key

to Martin Luther King's transformative preaching was not that he persuaded people of something foreign or new to them but that he articulated with clarity and conviction the truth that people already knew in their deepest being to be God's truth that integrity requires one to embrace and act upon. Craddock explores several dimensions in which the message of a sermon may be recognized as a retelling of another story, including the sacraments and the life and character of the preaching pastor, a twice-told tale. Niedenthal and Rice 1980, 2-4, discuss cautions about distortions produced when the place and function of personality in preaching is misconstrued, and guidance for a more balanced view of the role of the preacher's person in sermon development and delivery. Brooks 1989, 96-98, makes it very clear that "truth through personality" or "blending preacher and truth" does not mean preaching "autobiographical sermons" or loading one's sermons with references to one's own personal experiences. My intention of navigating toward self-expression is related to the individual, unique, personal, and situational aspect of sermon development as articulated by Davis 1958, 82. Self-expression, as distinct from paraphrasing, quoting, and citing the expression, words and ideas of others, is important because of the dictum of Davis 1958, 188: "the surest begetter of the congregation's interest is the preacher's own interest in what he has to say." I doubt that Davis had in mind the preacher's inherent interest in his own life story. Brooks 1989, 130-132, affirms the power of extemporaneous writing, that is, writing from the heart and with an awareness of the expected audience. That's a big part of what I mean by self-expression. Buttrick 1987, 96, 292, is critical of mere self-expression as a goal in preaching, yet he acknowledges 1987, 86-87, that each speaker has a unique or individual syntax. The latter is what I aim for in self-expression, that is, my own syntax, or as Davis 1958, 202-219, has it, my own predominant tense and mode of speaking in sermons. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 223-239, and Blackwood 1946, 139-154, discuss

personal style and literary style in the writing and speaking of sermons.

[¶10] Lowry's 1985, 58-60, discussion of *tone* in narrative writing and preaching, citing Wesley Kort and Frederick Buechner, insists that *tone* is not an indifferent matter of personal style or syntax but rather that *tone* reveals something of the writer's/speaker's world-view or religious/philosophical stance. Bultmann discusses the matter of world-view and philosophical/religious stance in terms of an existential self-understanding (decision to accept/embrace one's own existence) followed by a Christian self-understanding (set free by the gift of forgiveness and faith) in chapters on "Christian Faith and History," 1957, 138-155, and "The Meaning of God as Acting," 1958, 60-85. Self-expression or tone, then, is not merely a rhetorical technique or a notion of the Romantic Movement but rather a simple openness to and persistent navigation toward authenticity, finding one's own connections, thoughts and words. And Lowry 1985, 92-107, discusses the release of creative potential in sermon preparation or any other artistic endeavor or expression in terms of pain and grace, time and space. And that leads me to this paraphrase based on Lowry's 96-97 discussion: since creativity cannot be forced or easily turned on, when preachers and other artists talk about their creative process, they are really talking about the disciplines or rituals they use to undo the barriers that their conscious minds have been conditioned to put up against the free ranging of their unconscious minds, a freedom or creativity that is native and has been suppressed and that can be best let loose in the situation of pain and grace. Massey 1980, 87-88, points out that some preachers who are well-noted for their exemplary use of just the right words and compelling self-expression are not necessarily persons who always had a unique gift for words, but rather are quick to say that they have continually grown in the development of their ability to use the language well by dint of careful attention and hard work. Massey asserts that such development in the word-power of "master preachers" could

be observed if one could study a selection of their published sermons from across the years of their careers. Sloyan 1984, 27-28, writes of the importance of building one's word power by reading poetry and fiction. That is, one should not look to reading and other life experience and cultural consumption merely to mine sermon illustrations but, more importantly, to enrich one's personal experience and word power and to release one's own manner of speaking. Johnston 1996, 17, also recommends that preachers read good fiction because "Fiction writers use words well. They use words to explore the depths of human existence. And that's what good preachers do." That's all very true. But one thing is more important than reading poetry and fiction to grow and maintain one's word power and that is to read serious *theological* writing at the beginning of *each work day* to get the theological thinking muscle warmed up, that is, to invigorate the kind of *thinking power* that is required for the mental sorting and sifting that are necessary to make the day's exegetical work and all the day's tasks and encounters most efficient and productive in sermon development. I have cited several preachers and homileticians on the importance to preaching of the discipline/habit of general theological reading in Chapter III [¶ 46].

[¶11] Why is this repetitive round and round "battering ram of the mind" wrestling with text and scholarly commentaries and other theological study and general reading along with pastoral work, other ecclesiastical duties, community involvement, home life, etc., over two or three weeks' time so necessary and useful and productive? It is not because the scholars might give the preacher something to say. It is rather that, as Lischer 2001, 14, has it, "the preacher *is* the exegete, systematician, dogmatician, historian, and pastor" (also cited in Chapter IV [¶ 71]). Perhaps every preacher has had the frustrating experience of meditation on the text, reading several commentaries with good initial comprehension and ending with a sense of coming up empty as far as any gripping sermon possibilities are concerned. The preacher has faithfully,

studiously, and meditatively “checked the text”—David Buttrick’s unintentionally cavalier phrase—but to no avail. Perhaps what the preacher has not yet done is to let the text and commentators bounce around “in consciousness”—a very good phrase of Buttrick’s—during several weeks of reading, thought, prayer, and other experience in the world of everyday living until some sermon germs percolate or emerge, seeds are planted and germinate, productive conception takes place, gestation progresses – go ahead, mix more metaphors – and at least a sermon “idea” grabs the preacher’s imagination. All of this “growth” might be compressed into one week or one day for some preachers all the time and for most preachers occasionally. But surely, for most of us and for most occasions, the quality of our preaching and the quality of our own life will be higher if we give the sermon growth and building process a span of at least two or three weeks. Time should be allowed to ruminate on text and commentary findings in light of one’s own repertoire of homiletic strategies. And surely it is not too much to expect that a preacher’s theological reading will include one book by a *homiletic* theologian each year so as to gradually enlarge that repertoire.

[¶12] In some ways, my working method of preparing to write a sermon went something like the three-step process outlined by Davis 1958, 37: study the text and amass my notes; discover my true subject; decide what is the important thing to say about the subject. Except that I did not consciously or consistently focus on identifying a subject or what Davis also calls a single generative idea for the sermon. In fact, I have been and am yet resistant to the idea that an expository sermon must have a singular idea or subject. That way tends toward using the text as a springboard for thematic or topical preaching. Barth 1991, 93, notes that using a text as a springboard for our own world of thought is a tempting hazard, especially when we feel compelled to select a text to accompany the sermon we have already decided to preach. But I

acknowledge that when my study and preparation produced a moment when I came to my own way of expressing what I had found in my study of the text, it probably meant in some cases that I had identified a subject or theme to preach on, even if I wasn't thinking of it that way. The process that Buttrick 1987, 266-267, calls identifying a contemporary parallel to the text or, 1994, 80, distillation of a theme or topic out of the text is, to some extent, inevitable when studying a text. That is especially true when one has not yet been instructed how to look for what action the text was originally structured to perform rather than looking for what meaning the text was written to communicate. I mentioned in Personal Acknowledgements that the suggestion to motivate or navigate through study and reflection toward *self-expression* came to me from a fellow seminary student who had a strong background in literary composition and creative writing, and I might in fact have misunderstood or misconstrued what he meant by that, since I did not have that kind of background. But I took his advice to heart as I understood it and ran with it for forty years.

[¶13] I mean to be completely candid and unapologetic about the secondary level of scholarship that I have practiced in sermon preparation. I do not mean by this that I have resorted only to second tier biblical scholars such as some of the authors of “practical,” “laypeople’s,” “preachers’,” “teachers’” commentaries or “lectionary aids” and “sermon helps.” Lowry 1992, 25-26, discusses the temptation to short circuit solid exegetical work by turning to lectionary aids before internalizing the text. I have found it best to always use at least a couple of those commentators reputed to be top of the line of scholars and seminal thinkers in their specialty. As Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 87, note, the most popular and superficially attractive and promising current literature tends to abort rather than stimulate our own thinking processes. One problem with light weight commentaries is that many of them tend to reflect a certain place on the

ideological spectrum, perhaps reinforcing my own prejudices or being too superficial to accelerate or deepen my thinking processes. Consulting them usually absorbs time better used in more penetrating studies. As Old 2010, 338, wrote, “Sermon helps rarely help.” And Donald G. Miller 1957, 48, advised, “Ministers with limited budgets should avoid spending money on books of modern sermons and direct homiletic helps, and should through the years concentrate on building a library of the best commentaries.” I have several remarks and citations in Chapter III [¶ 29. a.] on the dangers to professional integrity in using sermon helps and shortcuts. When I say that my own scholarship is at a secondary level, I mean that if I frequently hit my target of distinct self-expression, finding my own words and my own connections between text and present context rather than merely parroting or paraphrasing the commentators, it is not because I have done original exegesis in the sense of my own translations from the original languages, even though the commentators occasionally drive me back to the Greek or Hebrew text and the lexicons. Buttrick 1987, 369, has a practical suggestion for those who lack the resources, facility, or inclination to research original languages: “do a comparative study of contemporary translations and paraphrases noting in particular where translations *disagree*, and where, therefore, meaning may be difficult to grasp.” Broadus and Weatherspoon, 28-29, suggest a careful and wide-ranging study of translations and commentaries to overcome a lack of knowledge in Greek and Hebrew, and they caution that there are dangers of distortion when relying on one’s own superficial knowledge of the original languages. Keller 2015, 215, 296 n. 7, mentions computer software and online resources that can assist one who lacks language training in a limited examination of the text in its original language. And Donald G. Miller 1957, 37-39, discusses both the pitfalls and the usefulness of a non-expert facility with the original languages of the Bible. Long 2005, 76, recommends avoiding modern paraphrases and simplified language versions at this stage of

comparative study of translations for the purpose of establishing an accurate text as a base for sermon preparation, and he lists examples of the contemporary renditions that he considers translations and those that are paraphrases or simple language versions. Barth 1991, 97, leaves no wiggle room when he advises preachers to read the text in its original Hebrew or Greek and render one's own translation. Neither does Von Allmen 1962, 50-51, cut preachers any slack concerning the use of Greek and Hebrew, yet his recommendation about commentaries consulted is only that at least one of them should be by a top-notch critical scholar. And it is not that I have done basic source, textual, historical, form, redaction, or literary criticism. It is rather because I have pursued and interacted with the interplay among the commentators until a manner of expression that cannot be blamed on or credited specifically to any of the commentators flows right straight out of me as I amass my study notes.

[¶14] I recognize that self-expression is only a preliminary step in sermon development and must be refined and edited to serve some worthwhile homiletic strategy that is designed for the hearers, the text and the gospel and not merely as a vent for the speaker's self-expression. Of course, the quest for self-expression must be governed by a decorous sense of personal boundaries. Buttrick, for example, 1987, 141-143, has some cautions about illustrations from the preacher's personal experience. Buttrick 1987, 147, 292, 305; Don M. Wardlaw 1983, 11-13; and Blackwood 1946, 53, have cautious comments on self-expression, humor, and cleverness. Blackwood cites James Denney: "No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time...No man can give at once the impression that he is clever and that Christ is mighty to save." Mitchell 1990, 116, notes that "The issue of humor in introductions is often raised in classes on Black preaching." And he states that humor, as helpful as it may be in helping speakers and audience open up to each other, "must be in the best of taste and held to a minimum." Brooks

1989, 57-58, cautions against becoming a pulpit jester with inappropriate humor such as a stream of Bible jokes and against becoming a clerical prig with false gravity. He also outlines the nature, compatibility, and necessity of true humor and true gravity. Or, as Buttrick 1987, 147, cautions, “If you are a naturally funny person, your problem is control; if you are not a naturally funny person, do not try!” Blackwood 1946, 117-118, discusses the limited place of humor in preaching. It must serve the purpose of the sermon, not the building up of the preacher’s need to be liked or his reputation as a funny person. Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 13, report that Halford Luccock (1885-1960) who was generally thought to be as masterful in his use of humor as in his use of illustrations had strong words of caution:

Humor in the pulpit which is the incidental and occasional product of the friction between the mind and ideas may be of great and genuine service, a veritable means of grace. But humor which delays the train of thought or forces the train to stop on a siding till the humorous display is over is an obstacle to legitimate business.

Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 300-302, comment on Harry Emerson Fosdick’s 1951 assessment of the consistent and highly effective use of humor in the preaching of Rufus Jones (1863-1948) a popular preacher on college campuses who was considered by Fosdick to be the preeminent interpreter of Quakerism in his time.

[¶15] Charles Rice 1983, 103, cites works of Amos Wilder, Leander Keck, and James Sanders in a paragraph that captures the importance of the preacher’s listening, seeing, and moving among text and context while doing exegetical work in sermon preparation. Further, 104-105, Rice embraces Helmut Thielicke’s metaphor of ferrying for the preacher’s necessary travel “back and forth between the world of the biblical story and the particular time, place and people with whom he or she has to do, including oneself,” a happily more dynamic image than that of the bridge paradigm (Farley 1996), which I discussed in Chapter III, especially in that it refers to the preacher’s movement during sermon preparation more than to the shape or intention of the

sermon structure. Thieliicke's travel image seems agreeable with the image of "the fusion of horizons" (Gadamer) and "the hermeneutical circle" which I mentioned above (Chapter II [¶ 15]) in a citation from Allen and Springsted 2007, 204-205. The metaphor of ferrying back and forth between the world of the text and the world of present experience is much more congruent with my own work experience than any of the step by step sermon development procedures that have been put forth by various homiletic theologians, such as the preparation tasks listed and described by Long 2005, 70-98, and such as Keller's 2015, 215-218, list of what to look for as one continues to work with a text using the help of commentaries and other research tools. Sound exegesis requires that the preacher be aware of these tasks and questions, but I find that these are the very matters that I am led to address as I do my round and round with text, commentaries, life, and general study; and I often discover insights, observations, and features that are not answers to the usual lists of study tasks and questions. My experience has been that my cycling or ferrying between the world of the Bible and our present world is greatly facilitated by my round and round with the commentators alternating with my own daily rounds in family, church, and community, and general reading, viewing, and listening. And, I think that my method of motivating and navigating toward self-expression, or in Long's 2005, 47, better phraseology, until I hear a voice and sense a presence and encounter a claim that gives me a voice, through a round and round wrestling with text and commentaries helps to subject my self-expression to the discipline of the content of the gospel. Concern for the congregation requires not only that I know the people but that I am continually studying what homiletic strategies actually function well in congregational consciousness, as David Buttrick has taught me. I am usually ten or twenty years behind the leading edge in reading the most seminal writings on biblical hermeneutics and other relevant fields of study. But I am continually consulting Bible book commentaries by preeminent scholars

who are well versed in the best of current developments in various fields of study, that is, who were conversant with the leading edge at the time of their writing. This approach, besides supporting my current sermon preparation, guides me to the most important studies that survive after the dust of the cutting edge has settled.

[¶16] My hard driving study discipline might seem like an unnecessarily laborious drill of repetitious reading and a real grind to someone who is a “quick study” and who always seems to grasp information and insights on the first reading. But “quick study” or “slow study,” each preacher must, to a large extent, work out his or her own sermon development process by trial and error, perhaps tweaking together elements of several different approaches suggested by instructors and colleagues. And when one finds a way to go that seems to work, it may be that, as Lowry 1997, 84, wrote about the “sudden shift” in the plotted sermon, the process “is not as complicated as it may seem,” and “The practice is in fact easier than the explaining.” And speaking of “quick studies,” the short lead times for sermon preparation that are mentioned by some homiletic theologians and eminent preachers are not advisable for “slow studies,” of which there are many and I am one. Ritschl 1963, 15, for example, mentions Monday morning and Saturday night as the outside limits of possible starting times for preparing the next Sunday’s sermon. Bonhoeffer 1975, 148, advised his homiletics students to begin on Sunday seeking a text for the next Sunday, make a decision on Monday, begin sermon development on Tuesday at the latest, and finish writing on Friday; yet he recommends more lead time to plan sermon series for the high seasons of Advent to Christmas and Easter to Pentecost, which seems counter intuitive unless one thinks it important to be especially impressive in the high and holy times for the sake of both regular worshipers and seasonal worshipers or for whatever strategic reasons. Wiersbe 1989, 15, reports that Phillips Brooks’ routine was to select his sermon topic and text on Tuesday of the week to be preached.

Paul Sherer's (1892-1969) preparation schedule beginning with selection of topic and text on Monday morning of the week the sermon was to be preached can be seen in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 301-302. Samuel Shoemaker described the mechanics of his sermon preparation work to which he dedicated "a couple of mornings a week," mechanics that included composition on a typewriter as thought flowed and resort to the sermon ideas and aphorisms that he had previously filed on index cards, as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 75. But for someone who lacks such quickness, a plodder such as I am, the long lead time of a three-week preparation cycle may be the only path available to effective sermon development. Wilson 2007 captions the book sections describing the elements of sermon preparation as follows:

Section 1: Monday: Getting Started

Section II: Tuesday: Connecting Bible and Today

Section III: Wednesday: Drawing on Experience

Section IV: Thursday: What the Preacher Says

Section V: Friday: Matters of Style and Substance

Section VI: Saturday: Gospel Matters

This scheme is simply a way of naming the major sections of the book and the major tasks of sermon preparation. But it creates the misleading impression that the preacher doesn't take a weekly day off, has not been working ahead on the current sermon during the preceding weeks and is not to be working ahead on future sermons during the current week. Wilson, 3, makes clear that he does not mean this six-day preparation schedule to be taken literally. But he does mean it to encourage preachers to spread the preparation work out over 3 to 5 days rather than cramming it all into 1 or 2 days. Spreading it out over several *weeks* does not seem in this scheme to come into view for Wilson. This unfortunate feature should not be allowed to detract from the usefulness of Wilson's discussion of the elements of sermon preparation. Massey 1980, 45, mentions two hazards of late planning in his discussion of preparing to preach a narrative or story sermon: (1) the temptation to cobble a message together out of borrowings from study resources

rather than composing the presentation in one's own words, and (2) a consequent non-animated non-involved delivery of the cobbled message. I am convinced that these two hazards of late planning are ever-present whether one is preparing a narrative type of sermon or any other kind.

[¶17] On the other hand, a three-week sermon preparation cycle is quite short compared to the advance planning of sermon subjects and themes by Theodore Parker (1810-1860), sometimes scheduling as much as four years ahead, according to Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 170, or the months long advance planning championed by Blackwood 1975 and Gibson 1954 and practiced by the pulpit princes of the central city tall steeple churches in mid-twentieth century, some of whom retreated to the mountains or the seashore for the three summer months for perhaps one month of family vacation and two months of study and planning for the next nine months of preaching, for example, Henry Sloan Coffin as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, VIII, 288. But it should be remembered that their approach had each minister developing his own "homemade lectionary," as Blackwood 1942, 18, calls it, or a preaching plan from year to year and quarter to quarter. Haddon Robinson 2001, 54, also recommends planning one's own preaching calendar for the year if a lectionary is not used. And Sundberg 1990, 19-20, reacts to the distortions, omissions, and homiletic shortcomings of the *Common Lectionary* by reverting to a student exercise of each one making a list of "Fifty-Two Texts and Titles," surely an unfortunate throwback to the glory days of mid-twentieth century. But when we are working from ready-made lectionaries, whether selected by calendar or following biblical continuity, and assuming long-range study of biblical and liturgical background material, perhaps a three-week cycle of specific sermon development is long range enough. Yet, Long 2005, 234, suggests working on the next 5 or 6 sermons in rotation using folders to collect materials. Ronald Allen 1998, 250-251, notes that determining texts, topics and themes a few weeks (or more) ahead "gives the subject time to

mulch in the mind and heart” and gives the preacher time to “research aspects of the sermon that need patient consideration;” and while he and Gilbert Bartholomew 2000, 135, comment that sermon preparation should begin early in the week to allow time for research and for percolation, they also note that many pastors select preaching texts and themes weeks in advance. Massey 1974, 71-72, insists that the creative process of sermon preparation must not be rushed and that the subconscious mind must be allowed to do its work: “The subconscious does queer things; it also does the right thing provided it is given proper time and is prayerfully guided” (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 98]). I am convinced that most preachers would be well advised to spread their sermon preparation out over several weeks with small blocks of time assigned each weekday to each of several upcoming sermons on a targeted but necessarily flexible work schedule. Consider these two observations: (1) Many, if not most, people cannot efficiently focus on the developmental work of one sermon (next Sunday’s) for a 3 or 4 hour block of time each morning. Either the mind loses focus with such singular concentration or, perhaps, one hits a snag or gets diverted onto a rabbit trail of fruitless research or a spiral of circular reasoning and needs to be rescued by the clock which says it’s time to drop it and shift to the next sermon on the schedule. (2) Recall the structured days of school years when in some cases we could hardly wait for the bell to ring and send us on to the next thing, and in other cases we were frustrated by having to stash our art work or shop project in the midst of creativity and high productivity, or just trying to get our “homework” done during class time. How great we thought it would be when we were set free of such imposed and arbitrary structures. But some of us will surely have to acknowledge that we were probably more creative and productive in those arbitrarily structured school environments than we might have been if free to put in many hours on one thing.

[¶18] Those who *are* quick studies and prefer to start from ground zero every Monday

morning developing next Sunday's sermon may find help in the weekly preparation schedules suggested in Brooks 1989, Skudlarek 1981, Fuller 1976, Ritschl 1963, von Allmen 1962, 39, and some of the contributors in Childers, ed., 2001. Of course, any of us can prepare a thematic or topical or situational sermon on short notice and support it with an appropriate Scripture passage or passages when the situation demands it, scrapping some of our regular routines or pulling late-nighters as needed. We do it for funeral meditations and we have done it when we generously agreed to speak to a civic club or at a community observance on an assigned special day topic with just a couple of days or less notice or when we have neglected our sermon preparation schedule or changed our text and topic during the week due to special circumstances. Stott 1982, 215, sees lectionary texts as suggestive rather than mandatory. And Doan 1980, 104, discusses issue-oriented occasions for variances from the appointed lections. Ritschl 1963, 8, asserts that preaching from the immediate situation rather than expounding on continuous or calendar appointed scripture passages could never have sustained the people of Germany during the time of the Great Depression/Nazi Regime/World War II/Holocaust. Those times were "limit situations" of long-term and global proportions. Buttrick 1987, 405-426, in the chapter "Preaching and Praxis," reviews the kinds of occasions that call for situational preaching, some of which are limit situations that are localized and shorter in duration, such as a close-to-home terrorist attack or some other mass casualty disaster, requiring short-term sermon preparation. In such cases, the preacher will be assisted by the fact that, as Ricoeur 1975, 107-145, discusses, religious language furnishes limit expressions for addressing limit experiences, including not only disasters and other negative events but also positive or peak experiences. Allen and Springsted 2007, 196, have an interesting presentation of the philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) indicating that "limit situations—such as death, suffering, conflict, failure, and guilt—lead us to the place where we

can hear the voice of transcendence and where faith becomes operative. For him, myths, religion, and philosophy are ‘ciphers’ that can in rare moments give access to what is beyond. They are ‘commentators’ on the original ciphers—nature, history, and personal experience.” Paula Gunn Allen 1996 makes several references in her introductions to selected short stories by Native American fiction writers to the persistent experience and awareness of transformations, liminal moments and of psychic and spiritual boundary crossings in Native American culture and consciousness, some of which are recounted in the selected writings. Driver 1998, 164, notes that the community rituals associated with transitional or liminal situations are informed by a greater sense of order than usual and, at the same time, by a heightened sense of freedom and possibility. The sensitive preacher will be especially aware of this delicate and sometimes exciting dialectic. Massey 1980, 82, in his chapter “Designing the Funeral Sermon” discusses the importance of using the church’s language, “such words as ‘grace,’ ‘deliverance,’ ‘hope,’ ‘faith,’ ‘forgiveness,’ ‘love,’ ‘eternal life,’ ‘peace,’ ‘assurance,’ ...with affective meanings in mind for the hearers.” The preacher may be fortified for situational preaching on limit occasions by a backlog of disciplined preaching from appointed texts. Who knows? — perhaps one or more sermons from his or her own archive can be adapted or recast to provide just the right word in the emergent situation.

[¶19] On the other hand, Bonhoeffer 1972, 281-282, in an addendum to his letter of 30 April 1944 to Eberhard Bethge, worries about speaking of God within the faith community in a way that brings the *deus ex machina* to the scene in order to hold a thus far humanly unanswerable question or insoluble problem at bay until “people can by their own strength push those boundaries somewhat further out, so that God becomes superfluous as a *deus ex machina*.” Bonhoeffer’s caution about such use of religious language and rituals is connected to his vision of a church and a knowledge of God that exist and function, as in the Old Testament, at the center of

the village and of life rather than mainly at the boundaries or in limit situations (also cited in Chapter II [¶ 34]). I have discussed several perspectives on “God of the gaps” in Chapter III. Barth 1991, 95-96, 118-119, cautions against changing text and theme to fit topics or situations of the day, including limit occasions such as a devastating fire, a natural disaster, or the outbreak of war, confessing his own misadventures as a preaching pastor upon the occasions of the 1912 sinking of the Titanic and the 1914 beginning of World War I. Yet, he concedes, 96, that “The direct inner relation (of the situation) to the content of the (whole) Bible and (the pastor’s) personal involvement in it will offer guidance and at the decisive moment make it clear what is the right text for each specific occasion.” Surely, one thing that is a greater disaster than a bungled effort to address, in a biblically based sermon, a current traumatizing catastrophe, whether local, regional, or global, is a failure even to try. And when the whole population of an area or a region is traumatized, such as in major floods, wild fires obliterating residential, business, and municipal facilities, whether or not taking a heavy toll in human injury and death, preachers will also have heavy demands of pastoral care and may be in need of spiritual care and self-care themselves, regarding which the reader may turn to the articles and the cited references in the Fall 2018 issue of *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* (100 East 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705-5797; Website: austinseminary.edu). Some recent back issues may be available, some older ones on microfilm. During the year preceding that publication, the seminary conducted two conferences for pastors affected by the massive devastations along the Texas Gulf Coast, resulting from hurricane Harvey in August 2017.

[¶20] “Quick study” preachers may or may not be better equipped than “slow study” preachers to deal relevantly with public disasters and other limit situations in their preaching. By the grace of God, all preachers may receive freedom, strength, courage, and wisdom to rise to

these occasions. But for week-to-week preparation of serious expository sermons, I am convinced that even the “quick study” preachers could do a much better job with a longer than five-day work-week’s lead time. As Blackwood 1975, 15-16, insists, the minister, having planted seeds in her sermon garden needs time for watering and cultivation. Blackwood also, 33, uses the metaphor of “subconscious incubation.” Others have used the metaphors of gestation time, fermentation time, time for rumination or mental percolation, simmering, mulching, and soak time added to research time. Lowry 1985, 96-107, concludes his discussion of things we can do to release our native creativity that has been blocked by social and rhetorical convention, by noting the importance of allowing plenty of sermon preparation lead time for doing some of the things that can break through our creative inhibitions. And Long 2005, 223, notes the importance of longer sermon preparation lead time in the matter of finding, that is, recognizing or recalling, appropriate sermon illustrations in the world around us: “If, for example, we are working ahead on a sermon in which the concept of ‘kindness’ will appear, some hard advance thinking about kindness will implant that idea in the creative area of our minds. Then as we go about our business, small, otherwise unnoticed events—a gesture of a department store clerk, a hand offered on a bus, an extra plate at the table—will attach themselves to the concept.” And of course cooking and developmental metaphors flourish in Childers, ed., 2001, *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers and the Creative Process*, where I think it was one of the contributors who acknowledged that there comes a time in sermon development when gestation and other creative or organic metaphors must give way to craftsmanship, the hard work of self-editing in view of a chosen, discovered, revealed, or inspired homiletic strategy. But, of course, the help of the Holy Spirit is also available in the craftsmanship of self-editing, using all the human skill, wisdom, and strength that God gives to us, which is also part of the gestation and birthing process of sermon

preparation and delivery, bringing forth what God has started in us. Forbes 1989, 85, wrote “I have noticed that women bring from their experience special knowledge about how to prepare and how to deliver” in his book about Holy Spirit anointing and preaching and sermon preparation. And he continued, “I was impressed that the texts in Advent kept talking about Mary (Luke 1:57 and 2:7) ‘bringing forth’ and Elizabeth ‘bringing forth.’” ... “Not only were these two special births made possible by the Spirit, but the Spirit, which conceived, also hovered through the process of gestation.” ... “And so, it is with sermon development. The Spirit is with us during conception, gestation, and even during the moment of delivery.” All of those developmental metaphors indicate the value of longer-range preparation time than one work week. A sermon preparation cycle of three or more weeks is also a good form of insurance against the hazard of the inevitable “bad week for sermon preparation” in the minister's life and work, described by Sloyan 1984, 25. Craddock 2010, 69-150, presents a complex round of tasks and considerations that must go into the development of a message to be preached and, 101-102, emphasizes how sermons developed over a longer period of time, facilitated by the use of a lectionary or some other system of long term selection of texts, are usually better sermons theologically, biblically, pastorally, and homiletically than sermons developed on a short planning schedule.

[¶21] And, of course, the greater one’s gifts of extemporaneous speaking, the greater one’s temptation to neglect adequate study and gestation time for sermon development and to miss that all important communication requirement: economy of words; thus obfuscating an otherwise good message with ad-libbed blather, distracting asides, and too much repetitive rephrasing. Stewart 1946, 150-151, as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 188, advised: “Have something to say, and when you are saying it, avoid...over-elaboration.” Most folks in the pews will not be edified by being slapped about the head with much verbiage; and many will surely be

distracted and discouraged by it. Each key idea may need to be phrased three different ways for good oral communication but not eleven! Fant and Pinson 1995, I, 117, transmit the following quotation of Augustine: “For just as the speaker is pleasing when he makes clear things which should be learned, so he is irksome when he keeps emphasizing facts already known.” In a similar vein, Barth 1991, 117, suggests that preachers can avoid coming across as condescending with definitions that are everyday knowledge to half of the congregation by weaving them into regular rephrasing, and, 120, insists that clarity in preaching can be achieved by integrity of form and content in the preacher’s words rather than by “seasoning the sermon with all kinds of illustrations.” Wilson 2007, 78, has a cogent summary of David Buttrick’s observations from communication studies about how ideas become conscious in the mind when encountered in public speech, the pace or frequency at which new concepts or subjects may be introduced, the amount of restatement or rephrasing required, and the necessity of transitioning to a new subject by restating the previous one in summary. And Wilson, 98-99, has a brief discussion of the use of repetition in his chapter on “Speaking for the Ear” and he provides a good example of artful repetition from a sermon by Laura Sinclair. A more balanced attitude toward sermon illustration than Barth’s *Nine!* (= No! the title of a monograph that Barth wrote in response to something that Emil Brunner had published about the residual usefulness of natural theology) is seen in George Buttrick 1931, 159, as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 265: Buttrick, whose sermons were noteworthy for precision in thinking and writing also used many and varied illustrations to help his hearers keep track of his line of thinking, wrote, “A sermon without illustrations is like a house without windows. A sermon with trivial or pathetic illustrations is worse: it is like a house with the windows broken, and the holes stuffed with rags and straw.”

[¶22] Barth 1991, 119, makes a strong case that sermons must be written out and carefully

edited due to the dignity of preaching as a liturgical, even sacramental, event, and that we will all be held accountable for every stray word, especially in sermons. Perhaps Barth was thinking of Matthew 12:36-37 “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (also referenced in Chapter IV [¶ 74]). Similarly, as reported by Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 264, citing Buttrick 1931, 159, 162, George Buttrick taught that the sermon must be written out in order for the preacher to clarify his own thought and to cut the diction so that it “shines like a jewel.” ... “Let the sermon be written. If it is not written on paper, it must be written just as seriously on the tablet of the mind.” The importance of careful writing in effective oral communication is highlighted in the work of the comedian Jerry Seinfeld who told in a radio interview of learning early in his career that the heart and guts of good comedy performance, whether a stand-up individual act or a scripted comedy skit, is good writing. And, of course, there is the matter of psychosomatic chemistry and ignition between performer and audience in the actual event. But writing is essential as is rehearsal in order to get that audience connection and ignition—think pulpit presence—in the performance. The product of all of such careful writing and rehearsal was always on display in both the opening monologue and set skits of the TV program Saturday Night Live, and, we would hope, in the best examples of substantive expository preaching. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the mere act of writing out a sermon is no guarantee against stray or useless or distracting and counter-productive words. I recently tried hard to participate as a congregant in a scripted sermon that wasted the first five precious minutes going over the sermon preparation scramble to get to a real point of entry for what the sermon was to be about. That is not an effective way to involve the congregation in sermon preparation and preaching. But I have endured such embarrassments several times during my 30

years of official retirement. When David Buttrick wrote of connecting with people through referencing an experience of shared consciousness he did not mean trying to enlist the congregation in the preacher's scramble to light on something to preach!. Barth included the phrase "and carefully edited" in his advice that sermons must be written out. Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 12, cite with approval Lewis O. Brastow's estimation of the direct style of John Henry Newman (Yes, that Newman, the one whose name has been taken by countless Roman Catholic campus ministries): "He gets to work promptly...No loose verbiage, no padding, no hard pressure upon the homiletic pump." Massey 1980, 56, lists as one of the four basic ways that sermon exposition can go askew: "belaboring the obvious, doing exhaustively what should be done suggestively and with stress upon application." I had a professor of theology who was the son of a minister and when asked to characterize his father's preaching style, he paused and said "belaboring the obvious." The fact that the ability to rephrase an idea in several different ways is an essential communication skill that can be overdone to the distraction of the hearers is illustrated in Dargan's 1912, 492, report of Robert Hall's critique of the preaching of Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) who is generally recognized as the preeminent and most gifted Scottish Presbyterian preacher of his time: "In a conversation with a friend, Hall said: 'Did you ever know any man who had that singular faculty of repetition possessed by Dr. Chalmers? Why, sir, he often reiterates the same thing ten or twelve times in the course of a few pages. Even Burke himself had not so much of that peculiarity. His mind resembles...a kaleidoscope. Every turn presents the object in a new and beautiful form, but the object presented is still the same...His mind seems to move on hinges, not on wheels. There is incessant motion, but no progress.'" This also demonstrates that the overdoing of rephrasing and repetition is not just a hazard for extemporaneous preachers with a generous gift of blather. Chalmers wrote out his sermons and

read them from the pulpit. Some of us are just as wordy in writing as we are in speaking—maybe more so. The hazard of wordiness is emphasized in Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 250-251; Davis 1958, 259-261, 280; and Haddon Robinson 2001, 135, 140-142. There is a big difference between a well developed and disciplined gift of extemporaneous speaking and the vapid preaching that is produced by an unharnessed gift of gab. Congregations might not be able to identify the problem when we exhibit the latter, but they can certainly feel it when there is a need of more brevity and clarity and less of obfuscation by way of verbosity and superfluity. Bonhoeffer 1975, 174-175, advised his homiletics students in the 1930's: "The most extreme restraint and conciseness of language is appropriate for the sermon. Every superfluous word causes the Word to become inaudible among so many words."

[¶23] Some who might aspire to extemporaneous speaking will do much better to preach from notes or a well-practiced manuscript. I count myself in that company. Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 100, cite witnesses to the preaching of Henry Parry Liddon (1829-1890) that describe him as mysteriously, even mystically, holding the rapt attention of the audience even though he read his sermons from meticulously worded manuscripts. This capacity is attributed partly to the logical structure and flow of his sermons including especially the skillful transitions between points of development. Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 21, report on Robert McCracken's assessment of Harry Emerson Fosdick's (his predecessor at Riverside Church) careful labor on his sermon preparation that made his manuscript delivery seem spontaneous or impromptu, which could not be achieved with any amount of delivery practice on a dense and complex, technical, fact laden manuscript. Fant and Pinson, 24-25, report that Fosdick's method of delivering his fully scripted sermon changed over the course of his career from memorization to extemporaneous to reading, and that for Fosdick the important thing with any of these methods of speaking is that "a sermon should be

delivered conversationally but with vigor and enthusiasm.” Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 143, report biographer Evelyn Waugh’s estimation of Ronald Knox’s preaching from a typescript: “it was a unique gift of his to give...the impression, while reading, that he was talking simply and directly to his hearers.” And they cite Horton Davies to explain how Knox developed and maintained that gift: “He fully rehearsed his manuscript until he was almost letter perfect.” Troeger 1990, 60-71, indicates how a sermon manuscript that has been written with a good ear for language that is meant to be spoken and heard does not have to be delivered as a printed document being read to the congregation. Haddon Robinson 2001, 183-186, writes of the value of composing just the right words for clear and concise communication and then practicing to deliver the sermon extemporaneously, i.e., without notes, not memorizing but with the basic structure well in mind. Sounds easy but it ain’t. Mitchell 1990, 123-127, discusses the delicate balance and interplay between careful preparation using educated scholarship and incorporating the spontaneity characteristic of Black preaching and a major contribution of Black culture in preaching that flows from a spiritual partnership of the preacher with God and the congregation. He does not rule out the writing of sermon notes or manuscripts, but he insists that preaching from these should allow for spontaneous interpolations (also cited in Chapter III [¶ 69]). But one must be careful that such spontaneous interpolations are not irrelevant and distracting asides. Bonhoeffer 1975, 148, emphasized the importance of writing to a clear outline rather than stream of thought, so that having written, the preacher may more easily learn his sermon by thought groups for the purpose of delivering it extemporaneously: “The preacher may memorize thought groups. Then the words take care of themselves.” I take “thought groups” to mean the same thing as “moves” as discussed in Buttrick 1987, 23-79. Fant and Pinson 1995, VI, 123, have a powerful description of Phillips Brooks’ amazing capacity of mental note making and organization prior to writing out a sermon.

But surely most will need to write some organizational trials on paper before a structure for writing the sermon falls into place. Craddock 1983, 93-95, discusses the functions of an economy of words when sermons are structured inductively, one of which is to allow the hearers to do their part in the preaching by mentally filling in details and completing the image suggested. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 194, discuss the danger of overkill by multiplying arguments, and, 260-261, explain how brevity and concision enhance energy, animation, and power in public speaking. Sloyan 1984, 20-22, discusses “The Hazard of Fluency.” I feel some kinship with Torey Lightcap 2010, 25, who writes that he is bold to assert that his own medium is the compelling phrase, by which I take him to mean a phrase that is clear and concise and contains appropriate imagery, a medium that, for most of us, requires less of the gift of gab and more of the art of thinking and writing. Yet, as Broadus and Weatherspoon, 249-251, caution, while affirming that a preacher’s speech should be perspicuous, it is possible for a preacher to overdo attention to just the right words to the point of pretension and preciousness or even obscurantism. The latter hazard is affirmed by Samuel Shoemaker (1893-1963): “We shall reach few with big words and polished sentences,” as cited in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 73, and he advises, “Speak conversationally in simple, homely, pictorial, vernacular language.”

[¶24] It may be true that oral communication done “live” in “real time” is more authentic and real than written communication no matter how well delivered orally in a public reading or memorized performance. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 318-339, state that, 337, “A speech, in the strict sense of the term, exists only in the act of speaking. All that precedes is preparation for a speech; all that remains afterwards is report of what was spoken.” Bonhoeffer 1975, 148, asserts that “once a sermon is written and thus committed to memory it is still not a sermon,” and he quotes Bezell: “the sermon must be twice-born, once in the study and once in the pulpit.” Long

2005, 226, indicates that a sermon only exists in the preaching of it, not on paper. Massey 1974, 79-89, in a section "Sermon Life," mentions important preconditions, of the congregation, the physical setting, and the preacher's state of mind and body, that contribute to effective sermon delivery. And then he describes at some length the homiletic/theological characteristics that a sermon must have if it is to live and make alive in the preaching moment. Ronald Allen 1998, 221-237, and in Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 122-126, discusses speaking or embodying or performing rather than delivering a sermon. Wilson 2007, 204, writing under the heading of Delivery in a chapter on "Speaking for the Ear," citing Bartow, Childers, and Ward, indicates that the act of preaching may be thought of as performance that can coincide with divine revelation. Powell 1997, 32-59, cites Derrida, Saussure, and others on the primacy of the spoken word. Zuurdeeg 1958, 69-95, writes on *Homo Loquens*: man establishes his existence by speaking. Ritschl 1963, 15, 25, asserts that dialogic preaching, and not the written word, is the first form of the word of God as words. Davis 1958, 164-165, discusses the difference between spoken and written communication. Long 1989, 34-35, describes how the difference between written and spoken communication affects the preacher's movement from text to sermon. Old 2010 (vol. 7) 350-351, describes sermons composed orally before the congregation by the Romanian (Eastern Orthodox) preacher, Joan Alexandru. Such oral composition may result in the most powerful and authentic preaching when done well. Consider, for example, John Jasper (1812-1901), the slave/freedman preacher, a great "natural orator," reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, IV, 225-257. Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 248, report that Joseph Parker (1830-1902) "counseled the preacher to cultivate to the fullest extent his gifts of mental composition. He believed that eventually a minister could develop the ability to compose his sermons mentally without the help of written material. He believed that such preparation was an indispensable part of extemporary preaching."

[¶25] On the other hand, Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910), according to Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 7-8, was not so certain that every minister could learn to compose mentally: “I began my ministry with the resolution that I would not write my sermons, *but would think and feel them*, and I have stuck to it ever since. It costs quite as much time in preparation as writing, and a far greater expenditure of nervous energy in delivery, but I am sure that it is best for me, and equally sure that everybody has to find out his own way.” Maclaren seems to have recognized as Parker did not that part of the problem with generalized advice for young preachers is that some of us really do have significantly less brain power than others and, more importantly, the brain power that we do have is structured by genesis and journey to process information in a way that can only be changed incrementally with great effort, and then not very much and usually not to good effect. R. W. Dale (1829-1895) seems to have discovered this fact in himself over time but refused to give up the struggle to go noteless. Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 150-151, report on a lengthy confession of Dale in one of his Yale lectures on his long and largely unsuccessful struggle to get free of his sermon notes or manuscript in his preaching; yet he insisted that “the overwhelming weight of the argument is on the side of extemporaneous preaching.” That may be true, but I do not accept Dale’s argument that every preacher should try with persistence at an early age to get free of notes or manuscript. In too many cases, “success” would issue in preaching that is blurred by extemporaneous blather, verbosity, too much repetition, and stuttering. Therefore, if one is incorrigibly a halting, stuttering rambler or a happily verbose bloviator when speaking without notes, then one should by all means study to write well for speaking and practice to speak well from notes or manuscript. Long 2005, 226-228, gives some practical considerations for deciding when and whether to preach with notes or without notes. Brooks 1989, 129-130, discusses “written sermons or unwritten sermons” and acknowledges that

a preacher may alternate between writing and not writing from time to time and that both approaches may be combined in one sermon; but he avers that mainly the two very different approaches must belong in general to two different kinds of people. And, under the heading of “Audience Awareness,” 131-132, as I mentioned above, Brooks affirms that if a sermon is written extemporaneously, that is, from the heart and with an awareness of the expected audience, then the fire and power and enthusiasm of that writing can break out in preaching from the manuscript.

[¶26] Dargan 1912, 539, reports a contemporaneous affirmation and critique of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) that he is a great preacher, rather than a preacher of great sermons.” Therefore, one who lacks Spurgeon’s preaching charisma must make the most of his or her sermon preparation skills by practicing to do the best possible job of speaking from a manuscript the sermons so carefully developed. “Practice” can take various forms. Simply “preaching to the empty pews” several times on Saturday nights and early Sunday mornings was helpful to me during the early years while developing skill at managing the papers on the pulpit desk and managing my speaking pace, pauses, pulpit presence, etc. But later that routine became so ritualized that I was reading or reciting the words rather than thinking the thoughts, becoming more bound to the manuscript rather than less so. Therefore, I developed various approaches to going over the sermon both mentally and orally, audibly and silently, in various venues and postures. Samuel Shoemaker suggested to beginning ministers that if they used a manuscript they should “Read it over beforehand to yourself two or three times, and once say it aloud. It should be possible for you to look down three or four times to a page when preaching, but yet to leave an impression that you are hardly even speaking from notes,” as reported in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 75-76. A demand for “preaching without notes” can be destructive. Soskice 2010, 52-53, reports an example of an otherwise competent and promising preacher having his health and

career destroyed by a severe general, local, and self expectation of spontaneous, spirit-filled preaching-without-notes. On the other hand, Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 124-126, report on techniques of preparing and speaking an oral sermon as distinct from memorizing an outline or manuscript. F. W. Robertson (1816-1853) emphasized the importance of sermon structure and method as the key to mastering one's sermon for delivery rather than memorization which if attempted would lead most preachers to "break down three times out of five," reported in Fant and Pinson IV, 370. Von Allmen 1962, 55, gives reasons against sermon memorization and a listing of pitfalls. Brooks 1989, 129, expresses the hope that nobody commends the once popular practice of "preaching by memory, the whole sermon being first written then learned by heart." A dramatic exception to the near universal caution against memorizing one's own sermon manuscript is seen in Fant and Pinson 1995, V, 282, where the strange case of T. Dewitt Talmage (1832-1902) is presented: an extremely voluble and dramatic, even sensational, seemingly extemporaneous, style of preaching with much theatrics that involved dictating his sermons to a stenographer two weeks in advance so that they could be printed in the newspapers the day after delivery, and then memorizing them for the purpose of delivery without the use of notes. The specter of peer and public pressure for embracing the fatuous fad of preaching noteless and pulpitless has reared its ugly head again in the early 21st century and has resulted mainly in a general increase of facile and vapid preaching. Graves 2001, 92-94, has a detailed description of how she prepares mentally and emotionally to deliver her fully scripted sermon extemporaneously. I have commented in Chapter IV on the false notion of that the use of a pulpit is necessarily a barrier to effective preaching. Ricoeur 1995, 218-221, writes on the inherent "textuality" of biblical faith. Many of us preachers need to do better writing before we start mouthing.

[¶27] One of my assumptions in latching onto the idea of navigating through the rounds of everyday life involvement in family, community, pastoral duties and study discipline toward self-expression has been that such self-expression will be inherently dialogical language that can connect with the people who hear the preaching and that such dialogic self-expression is a key element in effective preaching communication. But I have also been influenced by suggestions that actual dialogue with representative groups of congregants in the process of preparing and delivering sermons can greatly enhance the effectiveness of preaching. One time during the 1960's an article by Dietrich Ritschl in a denominational adult study magazine inspired me to form a sermon preparation and feed-back group. I and five eager participants of the congregation entered the experiment enthusiastically but with disappointing results. I did not feel that I was greatly helped in my sermon preparation and the other participants were disappointed at not being able to recognize their contributions in the sermons produced. I think the fault lay partly with false expectations by all of us and partly with my approach to organizing and leading the group. I distributed some of my best commentaries on the Bible book we were studying with the expectation that the group members would contribute for my use their findings in those commentaries. That did not work. The group members were at a loss to find anything useful in the commentaries and I was lost without direct access to my beloved commentaries! I now think that a better plan for a sermon preparation group would be along the lines of an approach outlined by Walter Wink in *Transforming Bible Study* in which the leader presents some brief critical background material about the scripture text and the group members are led to become engaged with the text in some constructive and creative ways of working with the scriptural material itself. A Similar approach is outlined by Swank 1981, 57-62, in his discussion of sermon seminars, where he also comments on possible reasons for disappointing results in such sermon preparation

and feed-back groups.

[¶28] I participated in another venture into collegial sermon preparation in the 1970's, joining with several pastors of local congregations—Disciples of Christ, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic—to work together for a season on the common texts from our then several denominational adaptations of the *Lectionary for Mass*. There was good fellowship but not much help in sermon development for me. I felt it was even less productive than scouring other peoples' sermon outlines or manuscripts for inspiration when I could have used the time better to research the commentaries or make pastoral visits or play tennis with one of those preacher friends. At that time I was not aware of a possible relation of what we were trying to do in a collegial sermon preparation group to the tradition of midrashic study as a communal activity in which Paul was trained, which, as I mentioned above [¶ 2] and in Chapter III [¶ 2], Johnson 1999, 270, references with a suggestion of certain passages in Paul's letters being set pieces produced by Paul and his associates, namely, Galatians 3-4, Romans 9-11, and Ephesians 2. Perhaps a group of preacher colleagues could do communal midrashic study of texts in sermon preparation responsibly and effectively if they scheduled a first round of group discussion of a text without having consulted scholarly help in the literature and then a second round of discussion a week later after the participants have consulted the commentators and reference books, thus a two-stage communal midrashic study of a scheduled preaching text.

[¶29] A year or so after that disappointing collegial study effort, I and the same group of local ministers initiated a weekly Lenten study series in which members of our congregations were invited to join with us in discussing Gospel texts for the upcoming Sundays of Lent. That was a fairly good experience in interchurch fellowship, but, again, not much help in sermon development. I felt obliged to at least make some oblique reference to our joint study experience

in my sermons; but did not always feel that such references enhanced the preaching event for all present. Willimon's 1981, 29-30, discusses several approaches to preparing congregants for a better preaching experience by advance study of the appointed texts. He notes that the group study and discussion can directly help the people to better hear the preaching, and thus, indirectly help the preacher to preach more effectively. And I note that lectionary study and discussion groups that do not include the preaching pastor have the advantage that they do not raise the often-disappointed expectation that the members of the group should be able to recognize their little gems of input when the sermon is preached. I could have benefited from Ronald Allen's 1998, 238-242, discussion of how preachers may learn about their preaching through the congregation in structured sermon feedback groups and in structured clergy colleague sermon preparation and evaluation groups, but that was published the next year after my retirement. In sum, my experience has been that the preaching and the congregation have been better served when I participated in one or another small study group that was *not* geared to the upcoming sermon texts and sermon preparation. That and my general round of involvement with the people has served best to help me make my preaching language dialogic in a good way. A dialogic style of expression in preaching is best defined and illustrated in Swank 1981, especially in his sample sermon on Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, 89-90, which I discussed above in Chapter IV [¶ 14].

[¶30] My three-week study and preparation rhythm served me well for almost thirty years whether I was preaching *lectio selecta de tempore* through the liturgical year or preaching *lectio continua de scriptura* through a book of the Bible. The initial publication of the Presbyterian adaptation of the three-year *Lectionary for Mass* 1969 in *The Worshipbook* 1970 saved me from further people's revolts like the ones that erupted when I gave the congregation two straight years

of Sunday morning sermons on the Gospel of Matthew in canonical continuity with only minor seasonal adjustments for Christmas and Easter and then did another two years on the book of Genesis. In fact, the two-year series on Matthew was interrupted for about six weeks on one occasion when a church elder told me that some in the congregation were growing restless with the Matthew series and could I not give them a break by preaching a series on a subject of practical interest such as the meaning of our way of worship, with scripture citations to support our traditions and practices, which I was glad to do because I too needed a break. And there were other occasions when I was moved by useful denominational program emphases to interrupt a long series on a Bible book for brief programmatic series on a theme such as evangelism, church officer education, or new models of youth ministry. Sermon series built around some area of church teaching or church practice may be thought of as educational or catechetical and come under the classical heading of *didaché* (teaching) as distinct from *kerygma* (proclamation), or as in Massey's 1980 chapter headings: "Designing the Doctrinal/Topical Sermon" as distinguished from "Designing the Textual/Expository Sermon." Fant and Pinson 1995, II, 88, quote a report by Oswald Myconius that when Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) announced in his first meeting with canons (ruling elders) of his new pastorate in Zurich how he planned to preach through the entire Gospel of Matthew, "some mourned and some rejoiced." Of course, there are always dangers and pitfalls to be guarded against when ministers devote a season of their preaching schedule to supporting a church program or need or emphasis. Bonhoeffer 1975, 165-168, provides some useful words of caution and advice on this issue in a section headed "Excursus: Concerning the National Mission Movement," in Germany in the 1930's. He asserts that any effort or call to support such programmatic movements in worship services and particularly in preaching should be submitted to strict evaluation as to whether the program overshadows the

preaching of the crucified and risen Christ. Fant and Pinson's 1995, I, 70, report of Chrysostom's explanation of a transition to a different part of scripture after four sermons on Luke's chapter 16 account of Jesus' story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" is relevant: "...to avoid wearying you and reserving this controversy for another time, let us direct the discourse to another subject; for a table with only one sort of food produces satiety, while variety provokes the appetite"

[¶31] A continuous series on one book of the Bible may surely go longer than four weeks, but three months may be approaching the limit of congregational interest. I soon adapted the liturgical year to six months of *lectio selecta de tempore* from Advent to Pentecost with texts selected from one of the Gospels according to the themes of the festal seasons, followed by three months of *lectio continua de scriptura* on an Epistle and three months on an Old Testament book, as proposed in my *The Open Bible Lectionary* (Book II of this volume). The three-week continuing and repeating cycle of study and preparation for the next three upcoming sermons which I had established in *lectio continua de scriptura* expository preaching turned out to work just as effectively for *lectio selecta de tempore* preaching following the Christological Advent-to-Pentecost selections of the three-year lectionaries. But I did not pursue this study discipline with any particular sermon shape or form in mind as a target or as the kind of structure or framework that I would like to fill out. Lowry 1985, 103-104, discusses beginning to write before you are ready, when you don't yet know where the story of your sermon in development is taking you or how it will get you there, as one way of releasing your creativity. I simply studied until I felt compelled or was required by an impending external or self-imposed deadline to write something down. Then the writing either flowed or was squeezed out in a kind stream or drip of thought sequence. Later I might be able to see some kind of order or structure or outline in what I had written, or impose a kind of outline by marking off division points, or perhaps by rearranging by

drawing lines with arrows in the margins or by physical cutting and pasting, usually forcing the material into something like two or three points with an introduction and a conclusion. The hardest part of finding or imposing some kind of structure in this stream of thought writing was always finding a non-abrupt stopping place or writing a summary conclusion that really tied up the loose ends and reinforced the main message. Sometimes I was influenced and helped by reading books of homiletic theology with some promising ideas about effective spoken communication or ways of organizing sermons. But none of these ever came to have a lasting or universal appeal or usefulness to me as a writer of sermons. I was never able to learn the rhetorical art of developing a sermon thesis, subject, proposition, theme, or outline before writing the sermon! I could never seem to develop sermons according to the conventions of the regnant point-making homiletics of the 19th and 20th centuries that, according to Steimle 1980, 171, had “laid a dreary hand on much of the preaching still done today.” It seems in retrospect that I had struggled for years with a homiletic strategy that had outlived its usefulness. I tried but I never really got the hang of that model. Perhaps it was my vision of motivating toward lively self-expression that prevented me from ever mastering the rhetorical skills of discursive argument that Don M. Wardlaw 1983, 17-18, referred to as a straitjacket, which I cited earlier in this Chapter.

[¶32] Then after thirty years I attended a preaching seminar led by David Buttrick. Following that experience and reading his book *Homiletic* I appropriated some of his categories that finally gave me a way of directing my Scripture study findings and my life experience reflections and observations into a much more organized set of notes to be used in sermon structuring and composition (also referenced in Chapter III [¶ 14]). At the beginning of my three-week preparation of an expository sermon I laid out six or seven (or eight or nine) 5 ½" X 8 ½" sheets of scratch paper, each with a heading adapted from the components of homiletic analysis or

structuring design in Buttrick 1987, 305-317, and my lecture notes from the 1992 Buttrick seminar, as follows: (1) *Structural Analysis* (combining *Plot* and *Literary Design*), (2) *Theological Meaning*, (3) *Analogies to Experience*, (4) *Roadblocks to Understanding*, (5) *A Field of Understanding*, (6) *A Basic Structure*, (7) *A Point of Entry* (not the same as Introduction), (8) *A Sermon Sketch*, (9) *A Final Structure*. Then, as I pursued my usual cycle of a roundtable or panel discussion with the text and commentaries along with other reading and everyday encounters and experiences, I had a structured place to go with thoughts, insights, observations, and revelations as they occurred to me. Of course, it was rare that I put something down on every one of those scratch sheets and I always had to add extra pages to some of them. But by the end of almost three weeks I would have jotted down enough raw material to feel some confidence and hopefulness about the task of writing out a sermon. The freedom, ability, and clarity to funnel thoughts and ideas from study of the text and life experience into the above nine note-making headings required that I frequently refer not only to how these headings are fleshed out and exemplified in summary fashion on pages 306-317 of *Homiletic* but also to the foundational concepts undergirding this structuring approach in the rest of the book. For example, it often helped me to get past initial writer's block if I reviewed Chapter 6 on Introductions. On the other hand, it was often expedient to begin writing based on my notes under the heading (7) *A Point of Entry* or based on my notes under some other of the headings and then go back to create an Introduction or sermon opener after some of the body had been written. Another key concept that I have to keep refreshing in my consciousness is that Buttrick's sermon structuring process does not provide a template or fixed pattern for the structure of sermons but allows that whether dealing with a narrative text (Mode of Immediacy, 333), a discursive text (Reflective Mode, 365) or a life situation (Mode of Praxis, 405), our problem, 309, is how to break out a new plot from the text or

situation from which we are developing a sermon. And I found that if I had really been able to compile some notes of insights and observations under headings (6) *A Basic Structure*, (8) *A Sermon Sketch*, and (9) *A Final Structure*, I could sometimes come up with a sequence of sermon moves and avoid that initial writer's block altogether. Further, it seems to me that while Buttrick, 308-309, cautions against the use of familiar stock sermon patterns, there could be occasions in which a field of understanding calls for a familiar stock sermon structure.

[¶33] With all the tremendous help and new sense of excitement and direction that I have received from David Buttrick and his *Homiletic*, the heart and substance of my sermon preparation discipline has continued to be my three-week cycle of study and conversation with the scriptural text and commentaries. After all, as Carl 1983, 125-126, is careful to remind us, the first principle of good writing and of good public speaking and, therefore, of good preaching, is not how to structure or present the message but having something to say. According to Barth 1991, 96-101, discovering what one is to say about what has been gleaned from a text requires a process of reading or listening that is receptive as distinct from spontaneous, passive or objective rather than active or subjective. Such reading and listening leads into checking out the text in original languages, comparing translations, considering the larger biblical context, analysis of the purpose or intention of the text, and consulting commentaries. I see this reading and listening to the text receptively or passively as a process that can include a rhythmic circuit among text and commentaries or that can be restricted to meditative reading and listening to the text prior to consulting lexicons and commentaries, as favored by several homiletic theologians referenced below. Long 2005, 47, as cited above [¶ 4], observed that until the preacher hears a voice in his wrestling with a text for preaching, he has nothing to say. And as Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 76, note: "If important to every speaker, it is supremely important to the preacher to have

something to say. Vapid nothings, no matter how well said, should have no place in a sermon.” And they assert, 338, that the first thing requisite to effective sermon delivery is “Have something to say that you are confident is worth saying.” Johnston 1996, 17, responded to a follow-up interview question about how young preachers can learn to be focused and concise with gospel power, answered that sermon development should begin with purposeful exegetical work and continue with some kind of a clear thesis. “Some kind” surely embraces hearing a word or envisioning a homiletic trajectory or capturing a “generative idea” (Davis) so that “thesis” is not limited to a proposition to be demonstrated or “proved.” Willimon 2005, 43, “gets theological” and specifies that effective preaching requires having something to say *about God*, because “Scripture always and everywhere tends to speak primarily about God...” Or, as Gardner Taylor 1983, 137, has it, “A sermon has the greatest chance of accomplishing its proper hoped-for and prayed-for purpose in human life when it arises out of the preacher’s own faith that in the words of Scripture a Word arises.”

[¶34] My round and round reading of text and commentaries is the part of sermon preparation for which Buttrick 1987, 280, wrote “we will naturally avail ourselves of all kinds of critical methods as we study texts.” But I think Buttrick 1987, 306, too lightly assumes that preachers have a good hold on this aspect of sermon preparation as is indicated by the words “We need not detail the process of study; most ministers have training in exegesis. Ministers will check a text, read a text, and study background material in Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and the like.” That summary statement of the processes and equipment of exegetical study gives no hint of the extensive and difficult work of exegetical study and thinking that are required to “check out a text” in the masterful way that is exhibited, for example, in Buttrick 1992, 53-91, “checking” the texts of the resurrection tradition, a work in which Buttrick claims, paradoxically, to keep

exegetical explanations to a minimum. Davis 1958, 81, also *assumes* the preacher shall have done thorough exegetical study of the text and made careful notes of findings before beginning to ask Davis's recommended developmental questions of the subject or the generative idea extracted from the text. Lowry 1980, 17, 20, lightly acknowledges the exegetical study part of getting started on sermon preparation: "read the lectionary passages for the day," and "sermon work...begins with biblical exegesis." A preacher might be inspired and guided to "become more imaginative" by reading Troeger 1990, 13-30, but only if that preacher has a regular and strong program of theological study and specific preparation through exegetical work on texts for upcoming sermons. Buttrick, Davis, Lowry, Troeger and many other homiletic theologians seem to reflect what Craddock 2002, 4, citing Kierkegaard, calls a widespread suspicion of or embarrassment about the word *how*, and in particular *how to* do extended exegetical study as a continuing part of the process of sermon development and not just as an isolated element or a preliminary step or early step or later step in that process. Those writers are strong on *how to* choose or develop a homiletic strategy after having got a good hold on the text, but they seem oblivious to the fact that one must keep on getting a better and clearer grasp of the text while choosing or developing a homiletic approach. Yes, every seminary trained preacher has received and paid dearly for the tools and abilities to study and interpret a text of Scripture. Those tools and abilities are described very well in Skudlarek 1991, 354-5, Articles 25-30. Studying a text with contemporary commentaries means that the preacher will discover insights and observations from the experts in historical criticism, literary criticism, and theological criticism.

[¶35] Some of the background and contributions of those three overlapping disciplines are helpfully presented in Wilson 2007, 11-25, concluding, 19-25, with a list of 35 questions to ask of the text in unifying the process of historical, literary, and theological exegesis, which he discusses

more specifically for the work of sermon development in the last two chapters, 229-262. Here, 19-25, he demonstrates the use of these questions in the interpreter/preacher's study process with his own lectionary appointed preaching text, Isaiah 6:1-13, as an example. His demonstration shows that one can often make at least tentative answers to a question based on intrinsic study of the scriptures and one's general background knowledge and experience of the Bible and life and, 16, "listening to the text while listening to one's life." And, on the other hand, his demonstration also shows that one may draw a blank on some questions without reference to a lexicon, atlas, study Bible, or commentary. But it is important that by use of these questions rather than simply going straight to the commentaries the preacher/interpreter is at least practicing a shorthand version of the disciplines of historical, literary, and theological analysis rather than simply being spoon-fed by the experts. It seems to me that the 35 questions prompt mainly literary and theological analysis and not very much of historical analysis. And that is understandable since Wilson, 14, credits literary criticism with encouraging the study of a text on one's own before consulting commentaries and since he notes, 16, that theological analysis of texts is not new—treating the Bible as a written memoir of God's self-revelation to people in the past and as a witness through which God may be revealed to readers and hearers by the work of the Holy Spirit in the present—but such a faith-based theological or revelatory approach to the Bible's witness has not always been identified by biblical scholars and homiletic theologians—certainly not under the dominant sway of historical criticism since the 17th-18th centuries Enlightenment—as an integral aspect of biblical exegesis for the purposes of Christian preaching and teaching. But the minister who follows this exercise of first hand analysis by reviewing multiple commentaries and introductory articles on the book of the Bible at hand will discover important historical questions and observations that she or he had not noticed in the direct encounter with the text. And, as

Wilson, 17, indicates, the interpreter/preacher, having already done some literary and theological exegesis will be better equipped to avoid the imbalance and distortion that can be caused by a narrow focus on historical critical exegesis. Thus, as Wilson, 17, indicates, a do-it-yourself literary and theological analysis empowers the preacher/interpreter to recapture something of the balance fostered by Luther and Calvin under the influence of the Renaissance, and Erasmus in particular, between an objective grammatical approach to the scriptures and a faith-based theological/spiritual approach. If Wilson's list of 35 questions for the preacher to put to a text before consulting commentaries and other study aids seems a bit cumbersome for starters, one might consider Massey's 1980, 52-54, suggestion:

1. *Study your given text or passage at firsthand until its setting, form, and insight are clear to you.* (Massey expounds at some length on this and each of the following three steps)
2. *Wherever possible, let the textual passage determine your outline and tone of treatment.*
3. *Summarize the textual message into a paragraph, then let your preaching concerns dictate how much of its insight(s) to use now, or later.*
4. *Sermonize the message, with your eye always upon how it is to apply to human interest and experience.*

But beyond these and other models that preachers might find suggestive, it is necessary that every preacher develop her own discipline and pattern for regularly and routinely using her knowledge and skills and resources to develop her own exegetical and expository insights and ideas from scripture study as the raw and foundational materials for the sculpting and scripting of a sermon.

[¶36] Buttrick seems to assume that the preacher completes the task of exegesis and establishing her or his understanding of the meaning of the text before beginning the work of structuring a sermon. But I have found it more productive to use Buttrick's structuring framework or Davis's developmental questions (asked of the text, as Haddon Robinson 2001, 77-96, does, and not just asked of a subject or a generative idea extracted from the text as in Davis) and my exegetical round and round with text and commentaries to develop exegesis and sermon

structuring raw materials at the same time. There are other schemes for pigeonholing one's study notes, insights, and ideas as they come, such as Haddon Robinson's 2001, 139, list of "stages." If I were to use Robinson's scheme, I would write each of these "stages" at the head of a separate sheet of note paper, knowing that I might get a tentative idea for "6. Determining the Sermon's Purpose" before completely "4. Analyzing the Exegetical Idea" or "5. Formulating the Homiletical Idea," and could later make corrections to approximate more closely the logic of Robinson's sequential stages, a sequence which is essential to the meaning of exegesis and exposition. Another attractive scheme for organizing one's thoughts and discoveries toward sermon moves while wrestling with a text and the world of now is that of Wilson 2007, 154-155—Page one: *Trouble in the biblical text*; Page two: *Trouble in the world*; Page three: *Grace in the biblical text*; Page four: *Grace in our world*. Another scheme for organizing sermon development notes while on the go in exegetical study, theological and general reading, pastoral work, organizational leadership, family and community life, etc., might be the subtitles of the headings of Chapters III – VII of Donald Miller 1957, 53-153, *Theme, Balance, Development, Purpose, Atmosphere*, requiring occasional review of those 100 pages to refresh awareness of what those headings are about. Or a preacher might use Lowry's 1985, 76-77, narrative structuring categories with descriptive subtitles in somewhat the same way that I have used Buttrick's structuring categories, putting each narrative category—*setting; character and action; tone; plot*—at the head of a blank sheet of paper, including, at first while learning, a brief subtitle defining each of these tasks according to Lowry's description of each. This narrative structuring format for channeling and organizing one's exegetical findings and reflections on life and the world surely makes it clear that narrative style in preaching is not simply a matter of being a story-creator or a story-collector. As Lowry 1985, 76, writes, "Indeed we will be saying much of

the same things we would otherwise say,” (with thematic or point-form/divisional sermon organization) “except that the evocative power of narrative form will prompt new angles of vision and particularize our proclamation of the gospel.”

[¶37] As to meditating on the text before consulting study resources, I have also found that my thinking or meditating on the text itself takes place mainly during the times and spaces *between* these deliberate efforts with text and study resources as part of the percolating or gestation process, that is, as part of the associative process described by Willimon 1981, and I have never got very far trying to meditate on or brainstorm the text before getting into the research work, as is recommended by many homiletic theologians and practiced by some preachers. Skudlarek 1991, 366, for example, suggests reading and re-reading and re-re-reading the text meditatively and making notes of one’s thoughts and ideas for a couple of days before consulting commentaries to check whether one’s jottings are consistent with sound exegesis. Lowry 1980, 85, notes that our study of the Scriptures will be more productive homiletically when we apply our own thinking to the text, perhaps in several translations, rather than turn quickly to the exegetes to receive their findings; and in 1985, 99, he asserts that the commentators and lexicographers will impose their mental ruts on the preacher right at the time in sermon preparation when she needs to release her creative powers rather than be mentally tied down tighter. Others who have written in this vein are: Troeger 1983, 153-155; Craddock 2010, 105-107; and Bohren 1996, 69. And there is more to the announcement by Zwingli, cited above [¶ 30] of his intention to preach through the whole Gospel of Matthew: He told the canons of the church of his new pastorate in Zurich that he would proclaim Christ from the Gospel of Matthew “not according to human reason (in the traditional commentaries) but according to the purpose of the Spirit, which through diligent collating of the Scriptures (in which I suspect the commentaries

could have helped), and through fervent prayers from the heart, he doubted not that he should be given to understand.” Zwingli certainly made it clear that preaching must be something more inspired and winsome than a mere cobbling together of observations gathered from a study of the commentators. Perhaps I could have been more meditative or contemplative in my initial approach to each preaching text if I had been more intentionally meditative or contemplative in my practice of personal daily devotional time with scripture and prayer, using one of the classic disciplines described briefly by Borg 2003, 198-199, including Ignatian meditation, *lectio divina*, and centering prayer.

[¶38] In retrospect, now that I have been retired for several years, I think that I could have learned and benefited from the art and discipline of encountering the text and meditating, reflecting and brainstorming on the text before consulting commentaries if I had understood Bonhoeffer’s concept of silence before the Word which “has nothing to do with mystical silence which, in its absence of words, is, nevertheless, the soul chattering away to itself,” as he wrote in the introduction to his *Christology*, as cited in Fant 1975, 63, and, more specifically, Bonhoeffer’s 1975, 145-147, approach to praying over the text and meditating on the text before analyzing the text, in which he reads the text as words addressed personally to him by Jesus; and he cites Kierkegaard: reading the text “like a love letter,” and Bonhoeffer’s analytical questions that he put to his own prayerful and meditative reading of the text “as a love letter to him from Jesus.” Bonhoeffer’s dismissive remark about meditation of the mystical silence kind suggests a certain irony since Bonhoeffer has been called a Christ mystic in view of his remarks about Christ and the text walking among the people when authentic preaching happens. But I suppose that all talk of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and such references in many church hymns including but not limited to 19th century “gospel hymns” and 20th century “contemporary Christian music”

songs, suggest a kind of Jesus piety or Christ mysticism, which of course is a different thing from the mind-emptying mystical meditation of Christian and other religious traditions. I was a little bit put off by the thinking and language of Carl Sagan, the agnostic lapsed Roman Catholic physicist, of PBS TV's Cosmos series fame (1980's), in his persistent reference to all religious and faith traditions as "the mysticisms." But perhaps Sagan was correct. Whether or not we call Christianity a mysticism, some mystical experience of the God whom Jesus said is spirit, (John 4:24) would seem to be a foundational element of the Christian faith and Way of life. That would be the same mystical spirit whom Tillich calls the Spiritual Presence or the Divine Spirit or the Divine Life or our ultimate concern or the divine ground of our being, and Borg calls the sacred or the encompassing Spirit, and James 1902 calls the more, and Paul calls the God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28) or this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), and of course that which the New Testament calls the Holy Spirit who lives and moves among and within and above and beyond the followers of the Way. Without some such spiritual or mystical experience of the sacred or the divine presence, any adherence to a religion or spiritual tradition could only be a matter of form and inculturation or a go-along-to-get-along skepticism as in "I'm just there for the family fellowship and the moral teaching and socialization of our children." Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 111-112, report that Bonhoeffer followed his time of prayer and meditation over the text, guided by specific petitions to the Holy Spirit, with a series of reflective questions put to the text before consulting commentaries and other research materials. Or perhaps if I had understood the meaning of meditation in the philosophy of Descartes, which Allen and Springsted 2007, 130, describe as distinct from the contemporary and faddish Western importation and resurgence of transcendental meditation in the Eastern mode.

[¶39] But, more importantly and more practically, if I had known of a step by step process for the work of meditating or reflecting on the text, such as suggested in Massey's 1974, 54-60, seven *a priori* hermeneutical factors for the preacher to bear in mind while reflecting on the text with a view toward interpretation in sermon preparation, all of which require some background in biblical hermeneutics but only the last one of which would necessarily require checking out scholarly commentaries and the exercise of the preacher's own skills in linguistic analysis; or Wilson's 2007, 9, suggestion of using the "practice known as *lectio divina* in Ignatian spirituality in which one holds up each word, phrase, or image as a means of envisioning it, experiencing it, and discovering its meaning;" or Troeger's 1983, 153-155, and 1990, 15, imaginative approach to reading a text meditatively, that is, paying attention to the impact of the text on the reader's whole being including all of his or her senses and not just the mind but also including especially the mind's capacity to create and internally project images of what is described in the text; or such as the thirteen-step process suggested by Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 35-41; or Keller's 2015, 214-215, reading questions to ask a text before consulting commentaries; or Lowry's 1997, 91-103, five steps of attending and imagining around the text prior to "Step 6, Engaging and Consulting as Scholar in Residence;" or Long's 2005, 69-98, "exegetical method for preaching," which describes nine tasks to be done before step "J: Check the text in the commentaries." Some of those approaches are more suggestive of textual analysis than of meditation and some would tend to drive me straight to the commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, and atlases without further delay. Or perhaps I could have used the structuring framework of Buttrick 1987, 306-317, before my round and round with the commentators rather than during that process; or the developmental questions of Davis 1958, 81; or Blackwood 1946, 34; or Ronald Allen's 1998, 120-150, "Steps to Developing a Direction for the Sermon" (19 tasks of reflection and research

applied to a text or a chosen sermon subject or life situation). Or maybe a preacher could use Haddon Robinson's 2001, 43 ff, grammatical categories of subject and complement, as a guide for reflection and making notes on the text before consulting exegetical resources. But I was always too eager to get on with my round table discussion with the best commentaries I could find! And I am convinced that most of the ways of encountering the text itself and doing the exegetical tasks and considering the possible connections with local and global concerns, church practices and theological teachings described by the homiletic theologians tended to happen or were best done by me as I pursued my round and round head banging with the commentators. For example, discovering unexpected nuances in the text can certainly be prompted by interactions with the commentators as well as by the exercises that Lowry 1997, 95-100, describes under the heading "Positioning Oneself to Be Surprised." An observation by a commentator often prompts me to have another look at the text and to see something quite different from the commentator's observation. When I am going round and round with multiple commentators of various theological persuasions I am more likely to be driven back to the text to think my own thoughts than I am to have the mental ruts of the commentators and lexicographers imposed on me, as Lowry 1985, 99, seems to think unavoidable when commentators are consulted early on in sermon preparation. Cutting to the chase with the commentaries is the process that worked for me. I pray that other preachers will find or design a process that works best for them.

[¶40] While working with Buttrick's structuring tasks in sermon preparation, I have to keep reminding myself that the notes I have assembled under the first five headings of Buttrick's structuring components, which I have listed above [¶ 32], do not constitute a sermon plan and that this process of gathering material and insights is not intended to lead to a sermon plan in the traditional sense of organizing a talk in outline form or of dividing one's subject matter into parts

or headings or of developing a logical progression for demonstrating a proposition. Buttrick 1987, 308-317, makes that fact clear. Rather, having gathered some raw material under those first five structuring tasks, one must devise a sermon structure or homiletic strategy that is appropriate for the text, the message and the audience and situation, possibly guided by items six, seven, eight, and nine of Buttrick's structuring elements which I listed above [¶ 32]. Thus, one is free to draw on a range of homiletic strategies or sermon trajectories including those suggested by various homiletic theologians as well as original ones that no one that we know of has ever tried before. Fant and Pinson 1995, IX, 22, report that Fosdick acknowledged the recurrence of three main types of sermon structuring in his preaching: BOX, points enumerated one by one as boards added in building a wooden box; TREE, main points developed out of the "big truth" as branches out of a tree trunk; and RIVER, sermon moves along as one great theme like a river between its banks (also cited above in Chapter IV [¶ 36]). Craddock 2010, 170-193, explores several approaches to selecting or developing a form for the sermon in process of being born. And Long 1989 proposes the preacher be open to choosing among the variety of possible rhetorical strategies that might be suggested by one's analysis of a scriptural parable to be interpreted in a sermon. In a similar way, having used Buttrick's scheme of gathering possible sermon materials and making notes in a structured way, a preacher might consider organizing the sermon around one of the rhetorical strategies described by Blackwood 1946, 69-82; or one of the five types of thought sequence described by Davis 1958, 174-183; or using the basic considerations of sermon plans in Broadus and Weatherspoon, 109-121 (I have a brief section above in Chapter IV [¶ 47] on some residual or salvage values in the much maligned and prematurely dismissed "older homiletics" of divisions, point-making, and propositional preaching); or around an inductive progression as indicated by Craddock 1983, 2002; or around a dramatic plot as suggested by

Lowry 1980, 1985; or perhaps even use as a model one of the sermon *sketches* in Buttrick 1987. Ritschl 1963, 175-179, would have us shun the study of homiletic strategies and techniques altogether, since such study might get in the way of allowing exegetical study and interaction with the congregation to develop and dictate a homiletic approach. But that is an illusion. Every preacher will get into a habit or rut of one homiletic approach without some study of various homiletic concepts and designs from time to time. One such habit or rut could be Ritschl's obsession with the idea of consultation groups such as a parish council or a congregation's governing board or a pastor's advisory committee helping the minister select a course of sermon texts or issues to be addressed with scripture and preaching, as well as study groups to work with the preacher in the preparation of sermons and evaluation of preached sermons. Any of these organized consultative approaches can immediately or over time, depending on how effectively and flexibly executed, prove to be more of a distraction, diversion and roadblock than a help to good sermon preparation and effective proclamation. And, contrary to Ritschl's insistence that focusing on interactive, dialogic, or collaborative sermon preparation will automatically or naturally take care of what to say and how to say it, Craddock 2010, 84, insists that the process of arriving at something to say is to be distinguished from the process of determining how to say it. But Ritschl's comment about the study of homiletic strategies may be taken seriously as a healthy reminder that having something to say requires the preacher to devote more time, attention and study to Scripture, theology, world, community, congregation, and life than to homiletic strategies!

[¶41] I have heard tell of beloved (or not) pastors with long tenures in one congregation or parish doing lightly updated (or not!) reruns of their own sermons preached years earlier to the same (but changed by time and events) community of worshipers and claiming that those who

recognized the rerun “didn’t really mind all that much.” I do not recommend such a slipshod practice, notwithstanding Dargan’s 1912, 101, report that King Louis XIV of France once told his popular court preacher, Louis Bourdaloue, who had begged permission to retire after more than thirty years at the king’s service, “that he would rather have him repeat his sermons every two years than to hear others preach new ones.” On the other hand, a preacher might be able to breathe new life into one of his own sermons previously preached in another place and to a different congregation. But even one’s own sermons usually need at least some serious tweaking or updating, and frequently have to be thoroughly recast or else replaced with completely new work on the same text or subject. Farmer 1942, 32-33, observes that even a preacher’s own freshly minted manuscript, outline, or notes always need another hour or so of focused attention on the day of preaching so that the preacher may “re-absorb” his own creative work so that his “I” may be in the speaking of it and that the hearers may encounter the living “Thou” of God. If that much is required with a freshly crafted composition, what must it take to get the living “I” and “Thou” into something from the archives? Probably more than just an hour or so of study and tinkering on the day of the preaching. N. T. Wright 2005, 137-142, insists that the authority of scripture is fully alive and active in God’s church only when leadership—bishops and professors, pastors and teachers—bring continuing scholarship to bear on their public speaking rather than fall into the sloth of merely recycling their previously delivered lectures and sermons. Broadus and Weatherspoon, 117, observe that some rearrangement of a sermon rerun is necessary so that the preacher’s interest in his own message may be evident in the preaching. I and Brooks 1989, 39-40, go further and deeper: the truth of the gospel that I preached long ago becomes a lie when I try to preach it unchanged much later. The truth has not changed, but I have changed and so has the world. And Brooks, 86, is surely correct in his assertion that preaching an old sermon to the same

congregation that heard it the first time will give some alert ones an impression that the minister is unfaithful in his commitment to the work. My own best experience in using my own sermons in a repeat of a lectionary cycle and for a *different* congregation happens when I do the following:

- Assume that I must be ready to recast or replace the old sermon.
- Allow the usual preparation lead time for developing a new sermon.
- Replace one of the commentaries used in the previous cycle with a fresh one that is new or at least new to me.
- Replace another of the previously used commentaries with my old sermon and treat my manuscript as one of the commentaries in my study cycle.
- Retain and restudy one or two of the most substantive commentaries previously used.

Only in this way can I discover whether the old sermon can be resuscitated, even though a bit stinky like Lazarus (John 11:39), by tweaking or recasting, or whether it must be returned to its tomb and replaced by all new work for the present situation and time. And, yes, this does usually save time and reduce pressure as compared with simply starting from scratch with the previously used scripture text. The joy of self-editing and editorial craftsmanship can play a bigger role in the work this time around.

[¶42] My pattern of study and preparation isn't for everyone, or anyone else besides me, but everyone needs her own pattern that works for her. Childers, ed., 2001 showcases the individual sermon preparation patterns of twelve serious preachers. One of the contributors, Barbara Brown Taylor, 156-157, mentions using a preparation framework adapted from Craddock and Lowry, a framework that tends to also be the structure of the sermon produced, and she has fuller reflections on her sermon development process in her own book, 1993, 81-91. Other patterns of sermon development work can be seen in Broadus and Weatherspoon, 296-299, giving the approaches of George A. Buttrick, Henry Sloane Coffin, S. Parkes Cadman, H. A. Prichard, and J. H. Jowett. Additional approaches can be seen in Davis 1958; Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice 1980; Lowry 1980; Craddock 2010; and Troeger 1990. Lowry 1980, 19, for example, suggests a

practical step in preparing to develop a sermon as a narrative with a problem and solution plot of dividing one's thoughts and notes on the text and theme into a problem column and a solution column.

[¶43] Finally, I was blessed in being called to be solo pastor in a series of small churches in small towns. I think that Willimon 1981, 24, (possibly other pages as well) is on target in proposing that the small church, especially in a small city or rural area, is, for a number of sociological reasons and not just the minister's time and duty demands, a much more conducive venue for faithful and effective preaching of the gospel than the larger, multiple staff churches in urban or suburban settings or, for that matter the mega churches and electronic churches. Keller 2015, 217, acknowledges the value of having begun his preaching ministry in a small town church due to the “highly relational character” of life and work in that setting, while in his case the time and duty demands were intense and heavy due to multiple preaching and teaching occasions each week. My advice to young ministers with appropriate self image and experience to realistically envision being pastor of a very large, multiple staff church, and with appropriate organizational skill and experience and preaching charisma to possibly be called or appointed there, is that they should carefully consider whether they also have whatever wisdom, knowledge, skill, experience, and discipline would be required to overcome or break through the big church barrier to effective and faithful preaching of the gospel. The barriers to effective sermon preparation and delivery in large and mid-sized churches do not constitute an excuse for slovenly pulpit work. They constitute a challenge to be taken up with greater energy and discipline, most especially in the area of commitment in establishing and maintaining one's personal work priorities.

THE FINAL FOUR: TYPESCRIPTS OF MY LAST FOUR SERMONS

I discussed in Chapter III [¶ 68] the fact that a sermon only exists in the moment of preaching and that a sermon manuscript or outline or sketch is not a sermon. Thus, sermons cannot be presented in print. But sermon notes, manuscripts, outlines, or transcriptions from audio-recordings or note-takers can be shared in print. Here, I share the lightly edited typescripts from which I preached my last four sermons.

[¶2] I mentioned in Chapter III [¶87] and Chapter IV [¶ 57] that Wilson 2007, 133, identifies three major sermon forms: points with illustrations (point-form or divisional sermons), narrative plotting (story-like sermons), and image development (mental picture created by the preacher's word picture – no show-and-tell artifacts or screen projections allowed because preaching is an oral to aural transaction). I see *four* types of structuring if propositional sermons, a subcategory of the point form structure, are considered separately as a distinct way of structuring sermons. I will say more below about this usage of the words proposition and propositional. Of course, there is some overlapping of these three or four basic sermon forms so that no sermon is strictly and exclusively one form only. And there are many more cultural styles and types of preaching presentation than three or four. But when it comes to the structuring of sermons, it may well be that just about any sermon of any style or cultural type of presentation may fit mainly under one of the three basic forms mentioned by Wilson. Among the structural forms named here, only the narrative or story form is not primarily discursive or expository in style of communication. Yet, even story sermons will require some discursive or explanatory elements to assure the listeners are not left wondering what the point or the take-away of the

narrative recital is supposed to be.

[¶3] Here, I share the typescripts of two of my sermons that mainly fit the point-form way of sermon structuring, one of them plotted in the structuring order of the scripture passage being expounded and one of them being expressly propositional in style and logical structuring. And then I exhibit one sermon that is plotted partly in a narrative style of presentation and one that is structured in the form of image development. These four sermons were developed and preached in the context of guest or supply preaching assignments after I had already been retired from active pastoral ministry for over twenty-three years. I have tweaked some of these typescripts for publication, including some deletions and some additions or refinements that, as has often happened, only occurred to me after the preaching. I think it is common among earnest preachers and other public speakers to have after thoughts about things we should not have said and things we should have said. So I have edited the sermon scripts, not to make them more readable but only with fixes that would improve the preaching should there be a rerun..

[¶4] I noted earlier in this chapter that I almost never thought in advance as to what structural form my sermon in development might have, except that point-form was assumed. But I never was able to develop a clear sermon plan, sketch or outline before writing but simply began to write stream of thought while piecing together some of my scattered notes and then looked at that product to see if I could superimpose some divisions with headings as points and possibly an introduction and a conclusion, and then tweaked that creature with some deletions and additions and rearrangements. And even after I had learned a structuring process for accumulating my sermon study notes in a more organized way by employing the structuring tasks described in Buttrick 1987, I did not know in advance what the sermon divisions might be. But the point-form or divisional structure and the discursive style, as distinct from a narrative

structure and recital style, was still my ingrained habit and was simply assumed.

[¶5] I can now see that whether a preacher is developing a sermon from a scripture passage or from a life situation, and whether using the structuring tasks outlined in Buttrick 1987 and referenced above in this chapter [¶ 32], to help sort study notes into rational categories *as the notes are taken* or some other developmental process or list of exegetical or structuring steps, some of which I have mentioned above in this chapter [¶ 39, ¶ 40], a preacher should not follow a regular pattern of always structuring sermons in the discursive style with divisions (point-form) or in a narrative format with some discursive elements for the purpose of clarifying one's main point, or in a discursive style of presentation in the plotted form of image development. Rather, a preacher should cultivate a familiarity and some skill in each of these formats so that at some point during the weeks of sermon development—the process of study and assembling notes for a sermon—it may appear – on the basis of the connections that the preacher will have made among elements of the text or the life situation being addressed and other texts, other images, common life experiences, the current situation in church, community, and world, the popular topics of the day, and the preaching occasion – which structural format and style of address will be most suitable for the sermon.

[¶6] Sermons constructed with divisions (points or heads) and illustrations and usually with an introduction and a conclusion are sometimes loosely referred to as propositional sermons. I discussed some historic practices and some contemporary perspectives in propositional styles of sermons including the use of classical categories of deductive logic in Chapter IV [¶47, ¶48]. It is true that most divisional or point-form sermons are propositional in the literal sense that the preacher ordinarily announces in an introduction that she or he *proposes* to discuss a certain text, theme, subject, issue, situation, doctrine, or problem under the following

three (or four or more) heads or points. But that is a rather indifferent, vague, diffuse, nondescript, indiscriminating and distracting use of the word propositional. It is not the connotation that should come to mind with talk of propositional preaching. The expressions propositional sermon and propositional preaching should be used with reference to an address in which the preacher *proposes* to demonstrate the truth of something other than their intention to follow an announced order or plan of discussion about a particular text or a certain life situation or subject. After all, if the preacher follows the announced outline or sermon plan then the proposition has been “proved true.” Rather, a propositional sermon is properly one in which the preacher proposes to demonstrate the truth of a certain interpretation of a text or a theological teaching, or, say, the root causes of a certain life situation or the correct solution of a particular problem in the church, the community, or the world at large. That understanding of propositional preaching means that it is a subcategory of divisional or point-form preaching. Propositional is not the kind of point-form sermon that has commonly been preached in recent times except, perhaps, in churches where it is still common to defend fundamental or orthodox teachings against the encroachments of historical-critical interpretation, and where discussions of science versus biblical faith are still popular. That is to say that most point-form preaching in North America nowadays is discursive but not expressly propositional. Therefore, I present here one point-form sermon that is not expressly propositional and one that is expressly propositional.

[¶7] The first point-form sermon that I present, “Reticent Guests, Outreaching Hosts,” takes its divisions or heads (points) from the obvious divisions of the scripture passage being expounded, Luke 14:1-14. Here, I note that one of the major threads of thought in the recent retooling and revitalization of homiletic theology has been the idea of having the structure and style of the sermon be greatly influenced and shaped by something about the structure and style

of the scripture text or perhaps by something about the preacher's encounter with the text. That is, the plan of the sermon might or might not mimic the order of presentation in the text but the structure of the sermon could still be influenced by the structure of the text. There is an excellent overview of some of the ways that this can happen in Don M. Wardlaw, ed., 1983. Other point-form or divisional sermons may identify several points or heads by examining a theme, an issue, a subject, a situation, or a topic from several different angles or by examining several different features or aspects of the said theme, topic, situation, etc.

[¶8] The structure of the scripture passage, Luke 14:1-14, for the sermon “Reticent Guests, Outreaching Hosts,” is clear: Jesus is on his way to a dinner at the home of a Pharisee and (1) Jesus teaches a lesson about the true meaning of sabbath when he encounters a man crippled with dropsy; (2) Jesus teaches a lesson about humility and basic courtesy when he sees the other invited guests at the dinner jockeying for positions of power and influence; and (3) Jesus teaches a lesson about true hospitality when he notices the in-group or inner-circle character of the guest list. My sermon dwells mainly on points two and three because that was the assignment I was given for the fourth Sunday of Lent in the series “Meeting Jesus at the Table” based on Campbell and Fohr 2023 and planned by my church's two Commissioned-Elder-Certified-Pastors, Pam Crawford and Janis Lussmyer.

[¶9] My second point-form sermon, “The Turning Point,” is expressly propositional. My proposition in that sermon is that there was a major turning point for Jesus in his understanding of and approach to his mission and ministry. That proposition and the scriptural observations that I submit to demonstrate its truth are not at all original with me and I attribute my knowledge of them to Professor Vincent Taylor in his article “The Life and Ministry of Jesus” in the section of General Articles on the New Testament in Volume 7 of *The Interpreter's Bible*. The word

proposition as used here and as generally intended when people speak knowingly of propositional preaching and propositional sermons is essentially the same as the use of the word proposition in a debate forum where each of two debaters defends a proposition that is contrary or mostly contrary to the proposition defended by the other debater. But the propositional sermon is *not* like the 2-column demonstration of a theorem in plane geometry class where each successive statement in the left-hand column follows from the previous statement in that column and has an axiom or established theorem in the right-hand column to indicate the specific deductive logic principle of that step. Neither is the propositional sermon like a controlled scientific experiment in which a closed or mostly closed system or environment is set up with all factors held constant except the ones being measured, so that there is a linear chain of cause and effect, with any possible interfering forces or influences having been rendered nil or negligible by the careful set up and fencing off and execution of the experiment. Clearly a propositional sermon is not like that. Rather, the propositional sermon is developed more or less like the defense of a proposition in a debate forum, that is, just like debaters, preachers bring forth their data and observations and reasons to help build a cumulative case for the proposition being defended. It is usual that each side of the debate will be able to bring forth valid and true evidence to support their proposition so that determining a “winner” will be a judgment call based on the accumulation of considerations on each side and the subjective predisposition of whomever is judging the case.

[¶10] The debate format and the propositional sermon structure both exhibit a patina of deductive logic in that both state their intended conclusion at the outset, i.e., the proposition. But that is only an exoskeleton of deductive reasoning since in both cases it is more common that the successive items of “evidence” for the intended conclusion are drawn more or less at random

without even a patina of a linear deductive connection between one piece of evidence and the next but, rather, the miscellaneous pieces are laid out with the intention that the accumulated weight will point to the stated conclusion. That series or accumulation of cases in no particular connective order is the very definition of inductive, not deductive, logic. It is notable that it is often inductive logic, if not a hunch or informed guess, that leads to the formation of a hypothesis for a scientific experiment or some other exercise in deductive logic. A debater or a propositional preacher might inject small pieces of deductive logic along the way in making their inductive case, but the overall proceeding is clearly inductive.

[¶11] Of course, when it comes to preaching a sermon in a Christian worship service there is not usually a debating partner to defend a proposition that is contrary to that of the preacher. But there is commonly an implicit alternative proposition that is at work in the mind of the preacher and the minds of the hearers. For example, in the sermon presented here, “The Turning Point,” the contrary proposition would be that Jesus, having the divine power of omniscience, did not experience a change in his understanding of and approach to his mission and ministry, but, rather, he knew completely in advance exactly how things would work out and exactly what turns and twists his earthly journey would take. The seeming shifts in his expectations and approaches were actually all part of the plan—the strategy and the tactics—from the very beginning. That proposition could surely be defended by a person with an ideological commitment to a supernaturalist perspective on the nature of Jesus’ person and work. There are many verses of scripture that could be brought forth in support of that contrary thesis or proposition, verses that were written originally – or later interpolated or altered – and transmitted by divinely inspired persons in early Christian times—believers who also had a supernaturalist perspective on the nature of Jesus’ person and work, a perspective that was part of the

predominant cultural/spiritual worldview in ancient times and would not have been intellectually problematic for most people, unless one honestly confronted the mystery and paradox of the incarnation—divinity in humanity and humanity in divinity. Confronting the intellectual questions and problems of that mystery is in fact what the spiritual/theological teachers, aka fathers, of early church history were doing in the infamous Christological controversies including heresy trials and executions. A preacher may mention the alternative proposition and thus make it explicit rather than implicit. But that is not the same as having someone defend the alternative proposition.

[¶12] The third sermon that I present here, “Building Life by Doing Words” Luke 6:46-49, is one that exhibits some features of a narrative style of structuring and presentation. One of the major threads in the retooling and revitalization of the teaching of homiletics during the past fifty years has been the shift from a mainly discursive approach to the structuring of sermons, such as in the point-form structure of the first two sermons here, to a greater use of a narrative or story way of presentation and structuring. That shift in the structuring of sermons was preceded by the introduction in Christian theological circles of narrative *theology* as an adjunct to systematic theology. And the emphasis on narrative theology was guided in part by the biblical theology movement with its emphasis on the historical narrative character of so much of the writings in the Bible and the narrative character of the worship and festival practices seen in both biblical Israel and the early church and, as well, the frequent use of narrative by a certain traveling wisdom teacher from Nazareth.

[¶13] The narrative shift in *homiletic* theology was spearheaded in part by Fred B. Craddock in several books on homiletics, beginning with *As One Without Authority* First Edition 1971 and by Eugene L. Lowry in a number of books including most notably *The Homiletical*

Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form 1980. The narrative style of structuring sermons is seen as more consistent with the natural way that people learn through the unfolding of the experiences and episodes of life, and more attuned to the following narrative features of the Bible:

- the frequent use of parables in the teaching ministry of Jesus.
- the narrative format of the Gospels and Acts in relating the episodes in Jesus' life and ministry and that of the apostles.
- the historical narrative chronicling in much of the Old Testament of the activities of matriarchs and patriarchs, judges, prophets and prophetesses, priests, scribes, kings and queens, with the action of the Lord God being seen in all of the above.
- the public recital of those actions/events as a characteristic feature of the annual festivals and other divinely called assemblies of all the people of Israel.

[¶14] I have struggled to find my way in the narrative approach to sermon structuring. But here, I present a rare example in which my sermon just seemed to spill out in a much more narrative form than my accustomed way which was mainly point-form but not propositional. “Building Life by Doing Words” could have started with an introduction in which I laid out the life teaching behind Jesus' story of the two builders of houses, that is, the teaching that a person's life (not a person's house) must be built on a sound foundation and framework of knowledge about life and the world that comes from experience but also from the wisdom of the ages, including biblical wisdom. But, instead, my sermon begins and continues with the recounting of contemporary episodes and examples of the collapse of buildings and other structures that failed to withstand the predictable storms, floods, and the continuous subterranean

undermining of the world as it is. A second way that this sermon participates in a narrative plotting style is in the abrupt plot shift or belated awakening (per Lowry’s homiletical plot) from a focus on contemporary examples of structural failures due to poor planning, skirting of building codes and flood plain zoning, cost-cutting specifications, shoddy workmanship, or all of the above to a focus on the true lesson of Jesus’ parable of the two builders, the building of life by way of the spiritual wisdom and guidance—the building codes of life—found in basic biblical teaching and inculturation and in the life wisdom imbedded in the other major enduring religions. My sermon starts out in a narrative style but then, after the switch from the building of physical structures to the building of life, reverts to a conventional discursive structuring.

[¶15] The fourth and final sermon that I present here, “The Apple of the Eye,” Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:10, is an example of a sermon structured in the form of image development. Another major thread in the recent ferment of retooling and revitalizing of homiletic theology has been an awakening to and recognition of the important function of imagination in the work of developing sermons and the essential role of imagination in communicating through the spoken word. This development stems in part from the recognition in biblical hermeneutics of the necessity of reimagining some of the historic connections and conventions in the interpretation of scriptural texts due both to new discoveries or insights about the cultural worldview context in which these texts were created and to adjustments necessitated by newer features of our current cultural worldview context. There is a good overview of some aspects of the function of imagination in sermon development work and in preaching in Troeger 1990. I mentioned several examples of image development sermons in Chapter IV [¶ 56, ¶ 57], one by Troeger 1990, one by Mitchell 1990, two reported by Borg 2003, and the present sermon by me. While my sermon “The Apple of the Eye” was built by developing that image, the

manuscript exhibits the main features of a point-form sermon: divisions and discursive language. Thus, in my case, the narrative sermon and the image development sermon, like the propositional sermon, appear in the printed manuscripts to be sub-categories of the divisional or point-form sermon. It is only when you get inside of the divisions and the interwoven discursive language that the distinctions among point making, narrative plotting, and image development appear. I had never thought that I might develop a sermon structured as image development until the seed for “The Apple of the Eye” was planted in my head at our family’s breakfast-time devotional Bible reading and prayer when we came across “Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye” in Zechariah 2:8 in a passage scheduled in the daily lectionary that we use for our family devotional reading.

[¶16] Each of these four sermons, while tending toward four different styles of development and structuring, has an inherent claim to being an example of *expository* preaching because each one sets forth in its own way something of the original meaning and intended function of a scriptural text while also proclaiming a similar or parallel meaning and intended function for itself in the here and now of the preaching situation.

[¶17] I have prefaced each sermon typescript with an introduction to the principal preaching text to be presented by the person who is to read that passage to the congregation. The purpose is to orient the congregation to the setting of the text in the Bible and to the place and connections of the text and the sermon in the current series whether from a calendar lectionary, a continuous lectionary from a book of the Bible or a thematic or topical series of lessons and sermons. This introduction may sometimes call attention to a thematic connection between the principal text and a reading from the other Testament. Another purpose of introducing the principal text in a “teaching moment” is to liberate the preacher from any need to begin the

sermon with that kind of information. Such information can be quite helpful and welcome when presented as an introduction to the principal scripture reading, but when used in the sermon opener it tends to shout as through a megaphone “Here comes another didactic, information-laden, pedantic, Bible lecture parading as a sermon.” That kind of sermon opener does not get the proclamation of good news off to a hopeful start. Yet, when some of that contextual orientation is taken care of in the introduction to the reading of the scripture text there will still be plenty of need for teaching elements in the sermon proper and plenty of time and space in the sermon for referencing information that is an integral and necessary part of the gospel proclamation. Anything that does not help the accomplishment of the purpose of the sermon should be omitted from the sermon.

[¶18] I have also provided the following liturgical accompaniments after each sermon typescript:

(1) **Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Principal Preaching text:** A Prayer for Illumination. This is prayed by the reader before the first lesson, which is ordinarily from the Old Testament. Or it can be used as an Opening Prayer of the service if the usual order includes such. A corporate Prayer of Confession—the acknowledgement of the sin and brokenness of life as we know it. A corporate Prayer of Thanksgiving which could be adapted and prayed corporately as part of the prayer over the offerings. Thus, in churches where the Lord’s Supper is still omitted on many Sundays, there would always be at least a moment of Thanksgiving even when the Thankful Meal and the Great Thanksgiving were absent.

(2) **A Psalm of the Day:** The Psalms of the day are taken from the book of Psalms in canonical order beginning with Psalm 1, a historic practice in some Catholic religious orders and in some Protestant communities, which I discuss in Book II, Part III, “The Psalms.” The Psalm

of the Day should be voiced by the whole assembly immediately following the Call to Worship, preferably sung responsorially with the help of a choral music leader, or sung as a hymn if there is such a setting in the church's hymnal, or sung in some other type of musical setting, or read responsively with a leader taking the odd-numbered verses and the congregation taking the even-numbered verses using the uniform Bibles provided in the pews or using printed handouts.

(3) **Liturgical Prompts based on the Psalm of the Day:** These are taken from my catalogue, in Book II, Part III, "The Psalms," of liturgical prompts based on each Psalm, Psalm portion, or combination of Psalms which together comprehend the 150 Psalms. These prompts are spoken by the pastor or other leader of worship. The Call to Worship is said immediately following the Prelude and should lead right into the singing or reading of the Psalm of the Day by the whole congregation. The other liturgical prompts, Call to Confession. Words of Grace and Healing. Call for Offerings, are said by the pastor or other worship leader at the appropriate place in the order of worship.

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, Bartlesville, OK

“Reticent Guests, Outreaching Hosts”

Luke 14:1-14

Old Testament Readings: Proverbs 25:1-7; Genesis 18:1-8; Leviticus 19:33-34

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPAL READING – Luke 14:1-14

(A Teaching Moment - to be presented by the person who reads the principal text)

Perhaps you noticed in the passages that were read from the Old Testament that each one had something to do with the humility of showing appropriate deference and respect toward other people in a social setting or with practicing openness and hospitality toward strangers.

Today’s New Testament reading is the fourth in our Lenten series on the theme of “Meeting Jesus at the Table” from the Lenten Study book of that title, written by Cynthia M. Campbell and Christine Coy Fohr, and illustrated by the lately mourned Kevin Burns. Thus far, Pam has preached on “I’m Starving” from Mark 6:30-44 — The Feeding of the Multitude; and Pam has also preached on “The Tax Man” from Matthew 9:9-13 — Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners; and Janis has preached on “The Rest of the Story” from Luke 7:36-50 — a sinful woman washing Jesus’ feet with her tears and having her sins forgiven by Jesus.

Meanwhile, back at the church library, the Thursday afternoon ladies Bible study group have devoted themselves to these same scripture texts and the study book on the theme of “Meeting Jesus at the Table.”

Today, the fourth Sunday of Lent, Jim will preach on “Reticent Guests and Outreaching Hosts” from Luke 14:1-14 which, like last Sunday’s lesson, tells of an occasion when Jesus was invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee. This passage is from a part of Luke, in Chapters 9 to 18, called “Luke’s Special Section,” because these episodes have no direct parallels in Matthew

and Mark.

You may see some irony in the fact that when Jesus has already announced that he is on a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem for a final and fatal confrontation with the religious authorities, that is, the high priests and the Pharisees, he is still receiving and accepting invitations to sabbath day dinners in the homes of Pharisees in the small towns of Galilee.

Let's listen to this reading from Luke, in case there may be a word today for us, the Good Shepherd church disciples of Jesus.

“Reticent Guests, Outreaching Hosts”

(a discursive/point-form sermon, the structure of which follows that of the text)

Luke 14:1-14

Intro. TEACHER ON THE GO; TEACHABLE MOMENTS

I think we all know already that Jesus was definitely not your typical lecture hall or classroom kind of teacher such as we have all experienced at various times and places in our schooling.

Rather, Jesus usually taught on the fly.

He was always on the lookout for what today we might call a teachable moment, a situation or encounter that provided a perfect opportunity for instruction in the ways of the world, and the ways that best honored the gift of life and the purposes of the Creator.

Jesus was an itinerant wisdom teacher, a teacher on the move.

When he was on his way to a dinner party on a sabbath day at the home of a Pharisee, he saw a teachable moment when he encountered a man crippled with dropsy, a case of edema so severe that he could not walk without assistance.

Another teachable moment appeared when he saw his fellow invited guests jockeying for position in relation to their prominent and powerful host.

And, he saw a third teachable moment when he noticed that the invited guests were all people of similar standing, achievement, and prosperity to that of the host.

The second and third teachable moments that Jesus seized upon are directly related to our theme for this Lenten series, “Meeting Jesus at the Table.”

So, for today, let’s think some more about what it might mean for us at Good Shepherd, to be the kind of guests and the kind of hosts that Jesus would have us be here in his house which is also our church home, the home of our spiritual family.

I. ON BEING RESPECTFUL GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF JESUS

I’ve been trying to think about how this might apply during our gathering time for Sunday morning service, if we think of ourselves as fellow guests of the Lord as we gather around his table on his day in his house.

There was a time, not so long ago, when some of our congregations had two factions about what to do with gathering time.

Some wanted it to be a time of meditation and prayer as we each entered quietly, sat in our own space in our habitual pew area, especially during the prelude.

Many churches had small but conspicuously displayed cast bronze or machined wood signs, usually with a scripture verse, encouraging everyone to reverence the Lord's Temple by zipping up their lips, or, at most, visiting quietly with their pew partner or nearest neighbors.

But there were also some irrepressibly gregarious people in most congregations who wanted to circulate freely among the people, talking and laughing out loud and shaking hands and patting shoulders, hugging, and, thus, "greeting each other with a holy kiss."

Here, at Good Shepherd, we have a compromise resolution of that tension: gathering music, followed by welcome and announcements and then meditative preparation time during the prelude.

We are encouraged to visit around during the gathering music, and then come to order for the welcome and announcements and then prepare our hearts and minds, during the prelude, for focused communal prayer, praise, proclamation, and celebration.

Well, I guess everybody is happy now, right?

Maybe so.

But I do wonder about how open and inclusive we are during that freestyle gathering time.

Do we just visit the people who nearly always sit near where we nearly always sit?

Or, if we do leave our accustomed place to circulate, is it always just to speak to someone for whom we have a specific question or some news to share about a common interest?

Or do we sometimes make it a point to approach someone whom we don't know very well and begin to get to know them a little better?

I *have* noticed in recent years that some of us really do make a point during gathering time to notice if a stranger or an unfamiliar couple or family have entered the building and to go to such people and introduce ourselves and extend a warm welcome.

And I thank God for such welcoming ambassadors among us.

Of course, all of these thoughts about our gathering time in the sanctuary can also be applied to our church family dinners in fellowship hall.

There too, we are guests of the Lord in his house.

And what if there are visitors or newcomers, such as the invited guest-speakers representing some good human outreach program in Bartlesville?

Just as in the gathering time at worship, some of us are pretty good at making sure that the guests are not left alone.

God forbid that the guests should be left at a table without any Good Shepherd folks joining them.

Well, as you can see, being a good guest in Jesus' Good Shepherd House blends right over into being a good host in the house.

Jesus has officially appointed us, the guests, as assistant hosts in his house, which is also our church home.

And, just as he predicted might happen to the reticent and respectful guests, the host has invited us to move closer to him and share the hosting honors – and duties.

We are guests here, but we are also representative hosts.

II. OUTREACHING HOSTS

So, if we are called to be under-hosts in the house of Jesus our chief host, what more are we called upon to do besides being on the alert to welcome newcomers, visitors, or strangers when they show up at our worship service or at our fellowship meals?

Well, I think we just got a reminder of our full job description as assistant hosts.

We're not just called upon to be friendly and welcoming under-hosts when strangers happen to show up for whatever reason.

The host of a dinner party actually instigates and organizes the get-together, and that includes sending out invitations, whether in person by each of us as a special messenger or by phone call or by email or by snail mail or by public media announcements.

But preferably the first way – in person by each of us as an ambassador of peace and reconciliation through Christ and the life of his body the church.

I know that we are off to a surprising and upsetting start to March Madness now.

It seems that some of us can't stop obsessing over our NBA championship tournament brackets since Number 1 seed Purdue was upset by Number 16 seed Fairleigh Dickinson yesterday.

Fairleigh who?

But, it's Sunday morning now, a new day and a new week.

And this is a Christian worship service.

So, try to remember some ancient history with me for a moment.

Ancient history: that would be Superbowl 57 - 5 whole weeks ago.

If you hosted a Superbowl party with lots of chips, dips, pizza, and wings or whatever – or if you were invited to a Superbowl party, was it just the same old crew or did you or another host include at least one person or perhaps one couple that had not been a regular part of your circle in the past?

Remember: Jesus said that as hosts we should be outreaching and inclusive; invite strangers, newcomers, and outsiders to come on in.

Superbowl – Super Family.

We're part of a Super Family here, and we throw a Super Family party here every weekend.

I mean every sabbath day – that would be Sunday rather than Saturday for most Christians – except for Seventh Day and other Adventists.

And Good Shepherd Church has certainly made a lot of programmatic efforts to reach out into the community and make this church more visible, more open, and more welcoming.

- Halloween festivals with the neighborhood kids invited to attend.
- A children's activity corner with church information at Sunfest in Sooner Park.
- State-of-the-art and public-health compliant facility for the best early childhood growth center in town.

- Carnival on church grounds in partnership with our Child Development Center.
- Sponsored a Boy Scout troop and hosted a Cub Scout pack.
- Provided meeting facilities for Ad Lib Singers and a Community Bible Study.
- Outreach program to unattached young adults in the community.
- Partnered with local Scout Executive and Jane Phillips Elementary school in outreach to at-risk children.

- Supplied volunteer servants, donated goods, and monetary support to: Concern, Agape, Family Promise, Ability Works, Kids Against Hunger, Voice of the Martyrs, Puentes de Cristo, Eastern Oklahoma Presbyterian Cursillo, Haiti Mission, Samaritan's Purse, Salvation Army, KAIROS Prison Ministry. CROP walk against hunger, Goodwill Industries, Paths to Independence, Mary-Martha Outreach, Light House.

Did I miss anything? Speak up if I did.

(Cupping ear): Did I hear someone say "Spudfest?"

Sack races are always fun, but it's hard to catch a new member in a 'tater sack.

These community outreach and humanitarian efforts are done in a spirit of Christian love and service.

Agape means doing acts of love without requiring or expecting anything in return.

But there is always a hope that some of these activities would not only render needed service and make our presence in the community more visible but also attract some visitors, inquirers, and even new members.

But, alas, like many other congregations and parishes that have reached out to their communities with humanitarian services and various kinds of attention-getting devices—"bread and circuses"—we have been sorely disappointed.

Something seems to be missing here and it's not just a Good Shepherd thing.

Many churches have had disappointing results from all of their efforts that were intended to make them known in the community as an attractive, vital, active, welcoming, faith community.

What is it that we and other churches with similar disappointments are missing?

Perhaps part of what we are missing is a recognition of who our target audience for

recruitment is and where they might be in their relationship with faith and religion.

III. IDENTIFYING AND READING OUR TARGET AUDIENCE

One social/cultural/demographic trend that has picked up momentum if not speed over recent decades is that an awful lot of people have decided, or simply arrived at a place where, they think that they can “be spiritual without being religious.”

What that might mean in practice varies a lot among people who think of themselves as spiritual, but not religious.

Some of these strayed sheep express their spirituality through the secular psychological practices of meditation and mindfulness, assisted by muscle-stretching and mind/emotion-centering exercises such as Yoga and Tai Chi.

Other people who have drifted away from church participation have not articulated a decision or claim to be spiritual without being religious.

They may have simply discovered that they can live a healthy, law-abiding, fulfilling, meaningful, enjoyable, compassionate, and socially responsible life without participation in a religious fellowship and even without any personal practices that they would consider spiritual or religious.

They are simply happy being secular people, and good citizens at that.

Now, of course, if any of these stragglers were willing to talk about it, we might be able to punch holes in all their reasons or rationalizations by citing relevant scriptural verses or sophisticated theological arguments from the history of Christian teaching.

And thus, get into a friendly discussion – or, more likely, a contentious argument - with our friends or family members.

But guess what!

Such discussions or arguments almost never change anyone’s mind or lead to a change in anyone’s life path.

They usually lead to people clamming up and avoiding the subjects of Bible, theology, and religion altogether.

And that leads to a second part of what we might be missing in all of our efforts to reach out

and draw new people into our fellowship here: and that is a realistic sense of what kind of testimony or faith witness on our part might have a chance of registering with anyone in our target audience.

That is, how can we verbalize the benefits and help that we receive from our religious practices and our church involvement in such a way that someone in our target audience might be led to reconsider their own experience and their present disengagement?

And this question is going to be our concluding challenge in this our sermon.

This is something we need to take home with us.

(I say *our* sermon because I know that no matter what I say in the pulpit you're going to make your own meaning out of this experience.)

Concl. VERBALIZING OUR OWN FAITH EXPERIENCE

Ask yourself this question: Why is it that I am still a church-going Christian?

What is it about my daily practices of prayer and Bible reading and my regular participation in the church fellowship and Christ-motivated service and action in church and community that keeps me here and on this path?

How do these religious practices and associations and group actions really feed me in body, mind, and spirit?

How do they provide structure and direction and substance and meaning and rhythm and joy and hope in my life?

This is what I want us to take away with us today, a resolve to think about this question and try to come up with answers that are internally honest for ourselves.

I say answers – plural – because your own answer for yourself can vary depending on the situation – the time and place when you are thinking about it and maybe even talking about it with someone who has fallen away from faith practices and church participation.

Now, I'm inviting us to think about this question in a very personal - even self-centered way – a psychobiological-coping way, a way that is true in the now.

It might be tempting for us to give an answer from our personal or family history or our sense of duty, such as:

- I grew up in a churchgoing, Bible-believing, praying family, and I guess I must have internalized that way of life as the way for me to live and move and be in this world. Or,
- I made certain promises when I was baptized at the age of 26 after I married my Christian spouse, or I made such promises when, at the age of 13, I confirmed my infant baptism, and I cannot go back on those promises. Or,
- We are still active church members because our children grew up in this church and, while our children have moved on, some of our good friends are still here and we stick together to support each other and to enjoy each other.

Those may be very good and true answers from personal or family history or a sense of duty, but they are not the kind of practical, here and now, experiential answers from personal psychology that I am asking us to think about.

It's also true that some of us could come up with a biblically oriented answer or a conventional answer in terms of traditional Christian teaching—an answer that we learned in Sunday School or a Bible study group or an answer that we have heard in a lot of sermons.

Those kinds of answers can be very good and useful as we talk among ourselves and as we study and grow in our understanding of the foundations of our biblical faith and our historical and cultural traditions of Christian teaching.

But those good personal and family history, biblical or Christian doctrine answers don't address the question that I have posed for each of us to consider.

The answers that we need to think about and clarify for ourselves are more personal, psychological, here-and-now, and experiential than historical, biblical or theological.

We need answers that are more now-centered and more self-centered – self-centered in a good way.

So, here's the question again:

What is it about my daily practices of Bible reading and prayer and my regular participation in Christian worship, fellowship, and service that keeps me on this path?

How does this Christian religious Way – that's Way spelled with a capital W as in Acts 19:9 – how does this Christian Way feed me – body, mind, and spirit?

Here are some answers that I might give or that you might give – first to ourself in all candor and honesty – and then to whomever we might be conversing with depending on the situation and the conversational context and the psychological chemistry of our encounter:

- Well, for one thing, my quiet time with a brief scripture passage and prayer early each morning helps me to renew my sense of dependence on God – that higher power in the cosmos and in my life.

And I really need to start each new day with that quiet time of acknowledging my dependency on God and asking for God's help in being the kind of person that God wants me to be and that I really want to be.

- Or, here's another answer that we might give of why we are still practicing, church-going Christians: My regular church attendance on Sundays provides a much-needed stop and start in my life – a day when my relentless cycle is broken – my syndrome of a task-oriented, obsessive-compulsive drive to get everything everywhere all done at once - at home, at school, at work and in my voluntary service projects and leadership roles.

I need that ritual or discipline of putting everything else on hold so that I can accept my limitations anew, and have my sabbath rest, and be refreshed to start over with a renewed sense of what is possible and a restored acknowledgement of who is in charge for the long haul, and from whence comes my help.

- Or, Sometimes our answer might contain more specific references, such as – Whenever I attend church, there is always some word or experience that restores my soul and my sense of God in my life and the joy of the good news of God's grace and love for all of us in Jesus Christ – whether in one of the hymns, a prayer, some special music, a piano meditation on some of my favorite gospel hymns, a reading, a sermon, or a human touch and connection.

Think about it.

And, as you go through each day of encounters with other people, try to sense or notice a moment when you have an opening and an opportunity to share your faith experience with someone close to you, someone who also continues to be a church-going Christian – or with someone who has lapsed, fallen away and, perhaps, decided to be spiritual without being

religious, or without even deciding simply arrived at that place of getting along okay without any religious practices or involvement.

Jesus was always on the lookout for teachable moments, moments when he could tell people how they should change their thinking and their ways.

We, on the other hand, should always be on the lookout for shareable moments – times and situations when, rather than tell people what they should think or do, share with them what we have experienced and what we do experience in our Christian religious practices and associations and group actions.

And then, ask God for the grace of wisdom and discipline to stop – and leave it there, and give our auditor a moment or the rest of their life to think and pray about what we have shared and to decide or not decide what they might do or not do with what we have shared.

That is verbal Christian witness and faith sharing.

On the other hand: If the person with whom you are speaking says “So, when are you going to invite me to come to church with you – or if you perceive that they might be receptive to such and invitation - then, by all means, invite them and offer to pick them up at 10:30 next Sunday morning.

LITURGICAL ACCOMPANYMENTS TO:

“Reticent Guests, Outreaching Hosts”

Luke 14:1-14

Old Testament Readings: Proverbs 25:1-7; Genesis 18:1-8; Leviticus 19:33-34

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1

1. Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Principal Preaching Text or Theme

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O God, open our ears to your voice in the words of scripture, and our hearts to your preference for the attitudes of humility and hospitality. We pray through Christ our Lord. “Amen.

PRAYER: CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have habits of the heart and comfortable customs that sometimes reflect our smallness of mind and our self-promotion and clannishness rather than the mind of Christ, which is large and self-humbling, open, inviting, and inclusive. Sometimes our habits and customs hold us back and we miss opportunities to reach out and invite others into our life and our circle of friends. God, forgive us. And give us wisdom to know when to stand back and when to reach out. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for Jesus, our master teacher, who took every opportunity to show us a more excellent way, the way of a humble presence in every circumstance and the way of outreaching kindness and inclusion toward all people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. Worship Prompts Based on the Psalm of the Day, Psalm 1:

CALL TO WORSHIP

Happy are those who take delight in the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:1b,2a). Let us worship God.

CALL TO CONFESSION

The Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish (Psalm

1:6). Let us confess our sin and brokenness to God.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING

The righteous are like trees planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3). Good News! We are made righteous in Jesus Christ. Amen.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS

The righteous are like trees...which yield their fruit in due season (Psalm 1:3). Let us present our gifts for the mission of Christ's church.

“The Turning Point”

Mark 7:24-31; 8:31-38

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPAL READING – Mark 7:24-31; 8:31-38

(A Teaching Moment – to be presented by the person who reads the principal text)

The passage that was read from the Old Testament signaled, in the time of the prophet Isaiah, a great call to the people and leaders of Israel to a change in their vision of God’s purpose in adopting them as his treasured people.

Their kings and priests and prophets had led the nation astray into the arena of international power politics, predicting winners and losers, and making a military alliance with one great power in the hope of fending off the encroachments of another great power, often with disastrous results.

But Isaiah’s message was calling the nation back to the vision of a different kind of role among the other nations, the role of exemplifying what it means to be a servant of God, a servant people, lighting the way to God for all nations by way of their example of justice and compassion for all people.

Isaiah was calling for a turning point in the direction and the leadership approaches of the nation’s powerful elite classes, that is, the prophets, priests, and rulers.

In a similar way, our New Testament Reading from the Gospel of Mark, along with other passages that will be mentioned during the sermon, seems to signal a turning point in Jesus’ vision and conduct of his ministry.

Perhaps a shift from the idea that the mission of Jesus was the same as the mission of Isaiah, that is, calling for the restoration of Israel to the nation's true destiny of being a light to the nations to draw all people to God, to a realization that it would be up to Jesus and his followers to constitute a new people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, to fulfil the mission of being the servant of the Lord, a light to the nations, a light pointing to a world directed towards justice and compassion for all people.

Not that such a New Testament call for a new people of God would reduce in any way the Old Testament's call to the Jews to become more truly God's servant for the cause of compassion and justice for all people. The church *is* a new people of God but that does not let the Jews off of the hook of fulfilling their God given destiny as a servant people for God's purposes in the world.

Now, hear the word of the Lord as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 7, Verses 24-31 and Chapter 8, Verses 31-38. These two passages, taken together, seem to mark a turning point for Jesus and the direction of his mission.

“The Turning Point”
(a discursive/point-form sermon structured as the demonstration of a proposition)
Mark 7:24-31; 8:31-38

Intro. TURNING POINTS

I have encountered a few people in the Presbyterian Church who say something like, “I grew up in the church, but I didn’t truly become a real Christian until a certain turning point when my personal relationship with Jesus Christ became real for the first time.”

But I have encountered a lot more people in the Presbyterian Church who say something like “I grew up in the church and I do not remember a time when I had an experience of spiritual transformation, a serious new departure in my lifelong relationship with the Christian faith.”

Some of us here might identify with the first experience of having had a real deep and life changing experience of encounter with God in Christ.

But I think that more of us here can identify better with the second experience of simply growing in the faith continually without any radical transformation experiences.

And yet, possibly quite apart from what we may think of as our religious life and church experience, all of us have had some major turning points in our lives: physical, emotional, social, philosophical, and spiritual.

As we continue on this journey of life, we will have more turning points, major ones and minor ones.

Can you think of a major turning point in your life journey that took on the proportions of a crisis, one that involved a decision or a recognition that changed the course of your life, or at least the shape and character of your life?

Perhaps some of us here may be desperately searching for a new break-through and turning point in our grasp on life and its meaning right now.

If we feel at least a little bit disoriented and confused or disenchanted with our spiritual life because of the current state of things in our church and world, it may be that we are on the brink of a serious change or redirection in our personal relationship with God in Christ and our sense of what God may be doing in the life of our church, our community and our world.

The most dramatic spiritual turning point in all of Christian history is surely the Apostle Paul's bright vision of the risen and glorified Christ on the road to Damascus; and we're all familiar with that story.

But did it ever occur to you that our Lord Jesus Christ—Jesus of Nazareth—experienced a significant turning point in the midst of his ministry and mission, and that there was a time of new insight even for the Lord in his sense of how his ultimate mission was to be accomplished?

The proposition that I intend to demonstrate in this sermon is that there was a major turning point for Jesus in his understanding of and approach to his mission and ministry.

That proposition and the scriptural observations that I will submit to demonstrate its truth are not at all original with me, and I attribute them to Professor Vincent Taylor in his article "The Life and ministry of Jesus" in the section of General Articles on the New Testament in Volume 7 of *The Interpreter's Bible*.

Listen to this verse from the Gospel of Mark:

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. ... (Mark 7:24).

That sounds to me like it might signify a retreat for purposes of reassessment and possibly the redirection of Jesus' mission and ministry, not to mention a time of rest and recuperation.

Let's look at our main text more carefully and consider the possibility that Jesus went into retreat at a major turning point in his ministry.

I. JESUS IN TYRE, SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN

What happened when Jesus departed from Galilee and went away into the neighboring country of Tyre?

Jesus had been preaching in the region of Galilee and there only to the Jews.

The region of Tyre was outside the borders of Galilee.

It was outside the pale of the Jewish world.

It was definitely considered to be the Greek world, the land of the Gentiles, the "other" nations.

Did Jesus go there to preach to the Gentiles?

That hardly seems likely, since the scripture states that “he entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there.”

And remember the strange conversation that he had with a Gentile woman of Syrophoenician origin who sought him out and found him in his retreat.

She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first (and here Jesus means, of course, the children of Israel as opposed to the Gentiles), for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs (meaning, of course, the Gentiles – the *other* nations).”

But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

And he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter” (from Mark 7:26-29).

Jesus really seems to have been in a negative mood there doesn’t he?

Could it be that he was in a terrible state of depression when he withdrew from Galilee into the region of Tyre?

He went into a house alone and didn’t want to be disturbed.

And when this Gentile woman came to him for help, he as much as called her a dog right to her face.

It was only the woman’s clever comeback about the dogs eating the crumbs under the children’s table that prompted him to take a more kindly view toward her.

Now, this is all that we are told in the Gospels about what happened to Jesus while he was in his retreat up in the region of Tyre to the north of Galilee.

But we can certainly tell from his conversation with the Syrophoenician woman what Jesus’ mind was occupied with at that time.

He was most certainly preoccupied with his commission, and that of his disciples, to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5; 15:24).

And if we look at the events before and after Jesus’ withdrawal into Tyre, I think we can safely conclude that Jesus was brooding over the failure of his Galilean ministry and that he was

struggling to come to a reorientation and fuller understanding of his own mission—what was it that he was supposed to accomplish in this world, and how was he to do it?

This thought must surely come as a shock to us who are accustomed to the assumption that Jesus, being the Son of God must have known in advance fully what his mission was to be about and how it would go.

Yet, we are also accustomed to the notion that Jesus the divine Son of God, in becoming human took upon himself all of our limitations, which would exclude supernatural knowledge of the temporal future.

So which way is it?

Jesus the superman or Jesus a real human being in the flesh?

Let's look at some of the evidence in the Gospels, beginning with Jesus' record of success and failure in Galilee.

II. SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN GALILEE

What had Jesus been doing and what had happened to him before the withdrawal – his rest and recuperation break in the region of Tyre?

Well, he had been preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near – at hand.

And he had been teaching the Jews that they should repent: turn to God to receive the forgiveness of sins and return to living according to God's intentions, because the kingdom was near.

And he had been going about doing works of power that cured sick and afflicted people.

Well, he certainly didn't seem to be a failure at this.

At any rate, he was the most popular preacher and healer of his day.

We get an indication of his success and popularity from these selected verses in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark:

He went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those

who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:23-25).

He preached the Sermon on the Mount, and “the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:28-29)

“When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him” (Matt. 8:1).

“When Jesus entered Peter’s house he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him” (Matt. 8:14-15).

Jesus “rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm.” And the disciples “were amazed, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?’” (Mat. 8:26-27).

He forgave the sins of a paralyzed man and “said to the paralytic, ‘Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.’ And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.” Matt. 9:2-8)

Jesus performed these and many more works of power.

And he taught that the kingdom of God would not come in after the manner of earthly kingdoms where the hero leads his people in battle and on to victory by the defeat of all their enemies, but that the rule of God would come in:

Like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. (Mark 4:31-32)

Well, many people followed him about and hung on his every word.

And many people praised God because of him and spread his fame because of healings and other deeds of power.

But no one seemed to fully understand that the kingdom of God was to be brought in by love

rather than by political transition or armed conquest.

No one understood that God was giving himself to the world—that all they had to do was repent, that is, turn to God and receive forgiveness and begin living a life guided by God’s love and grace and mercy—the life of a servant people that would be a light to all the peoples of the world.

And so, in spite of his outward success and popularity, Jesus began to see that the people didn’t really understand or believe what he was saying and doing.

The situation was urgent, and frustrating.

The kingdom was at hand, and yet most people did not repent but went on as before.

Jesus had announced God’s new and long-awaited reign of peace and love, but people did not turn to embrace this new way of being in the world.

And so, let’s look at what Jesus did next, when he sent the 12 apostles out in pairs on an urgent mission.

III. THE TWELVE GO OUT—A CRASH PROGRAM

Jesus’ growing disappointment and his sense of urgency about the emerging kingdom are reflected in this summary by Matthew just before the sending out of the Twelve Disciples.

Matthew wrote:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to the disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’ (Matt. 9:35-38)

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. and sent them out to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near. (Matt. 10:1, 7).

This Mission of the Twelve was an emergency measure—a kind of crash program to try to

get a few people to repent before the new age should break in completely with all of its consequences.

In Jesus' instruction to the disciples for the mission, a sense of urgency, and a sense of expected rejection, are the keynotes:

He told them to go only to the Jews—there would not be time to go to all the nations. (Matt. 10:5-6)

He told them to take no money and no bag for the journey – no change of clothes, no sandals, and no staff. (Matt. 10:9-10)

He told them to accept the first hospitality offered in a town. (Matt. 10:11)

And he warned them of the coming persecutions:

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.... When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matt. 10:16, 23)

But the disciples did return to Jesus to tell him what they had done and what had happened, for they had actually been driven out of several towns of Galilee.

The mission of the Twelve was cut short, not by the complete inbreaking of the kingdom but by the rejection of the apostles in the villages of Galilee.

Jesus' resentment at this and his growing disappointment and utter rage are indicated by his pronouncements of woe on those towns:

Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida!

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you. (Matt. 11:20-24)

And it was after this, that Jesus withdrew from Galilee, alone, into the region of Tyre.

IV. AFTER RETREAT - SUFFERING AND SERVICE

We have been reviewing what Jesus and his team of apostles had been doing just before his pause and retreat into the region of Tyre, and at the disappointing response of the people in those towns of Galilee.

Now, we must look at what happened and what Jesus did after his return to Galilee from his retreat in Tyre.

No one really knows all that Jesus experienced during his retreat, because he was alone—even his disciples were not with him all the time.

But all indications are that he returned to Galilee with a new vision and a changed concept of his own mission.

When he withdrew, he was preoccupied with his mission to the Jews, that is, the good church people of his time.

When he returned he ministered to the Gentiles, that is, the *other* nations, the people outside the Old Testament church.

And, before the withdrawal there is no evidence that Jesus associated his mission directly with his own personal suffering in a specific and ultimate way.

But listen to these words of the gospel writer Mark right after Jesus' return from his retreat in Tyre:

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

He said all this quite openly.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me,

Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (Mark 8:31-33)

Jesus had always known and preached that the kingdom of God would be brought in by love rather than by conquest.

But now he knew and taught that he would bring it in by a suffering love on the Cross.

Jesus is Immanuel, God with us.

But he is also fully human; that’s the meaning of the incarnation, that Jesus the Christ is truly divine and truly human.

And so, it is through disappointment and struggle and failure and frustration that he has to learn that “God with us” was not enough for this evil and rebellious and sin possessed world.

It was not enough that he alone among humans, having all the temptations of people like us, resisted evil and lived in complete faithfulness and obedience to the Father.

It was not enough that he, being the Son of God, offered freely to the world God’s love and forgiveness if only the world would turn from the ways of sin and self-serving.

It was enough only that the Son of Man should suffer many things and be killed.

Well, that’s it, the evidence from the Gospels that the retreat into the region of Tyre represents a major turning point in Jesus’ vision and approach to his own earthly mission.

Concl. TURNING POINT FOR ALL PEOPLE

The idea that our Master Teacher Jesus went through a time of personal crisis during his earthly ministry, that there was a turning point and a *change* in his own understanding of his mission, and that it was necessary for him to go into retreat and reassess the direction that his life and work were taking is really a surprising and shocking thought to many of us

But just think what it can mean to us in our own sense of direction and purpose in life.

The insight that formed the turning point in Jesus’ life can also be the turning point in your life and in my life.

Here, Jesus saw that the meaning and purpose of his life was not to be fulfilled in worldly victory but in worldly surrender.

Not in worldly success, but in worldly failure and frustration.

Not in the wielding of power but in suffering and service.

And it is exactly here that we as his disciples are to find our sense of purpose, direction, and meaning in life.

Not through the power we wield, although we may be entrusted with power at times.

Not through the goods we accumulate, though we all have a pretty big collection of stuff.

And not even through the church work that we do!

But through the personal surrender that we make in our relationships with others – at home, at work, and in every area and encounter of life.

The surrender that we make to our situation in life – and to the limitations and responsibilities that are placed on us.

It is through the service that we render to persons in need – as individuals, as families, and as a congregation.

And it is through the worldly failure, frustration, and suffering to which our surrender and service may lead that our lives are to find their meaning, their purpose, their direction, their final end, and their fulfillment.

The full insight and recognition that this is the meaning of life under God was the turning point in Jesus' life.

It is also the turning point in our lives, a turning point which we must be taken through repeatedly as our lives continually fall back into the old ways of pride and longing for worldly power, success, acquisition, accumulation, recognition, security, and comfort.

And this turning point, this personal surrender, is what we receive ever anew by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said,

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake,
and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8:34-35)) **AMEN.**

LITURGICAL ACCOMPANYMENTS TO:

“The Turning Point”

Mark 7:24-31; 8:31-38

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 2

Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Principal Preaching Text or Theme

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O Lord our God, send your Holy Spirit among us today, so that our minds may be filled with light from your Word. Show us how we can better serve you by serving each other and our larger community and world, in the name of our servant Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

PRAYER: CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have a natural resistance, O God, to the thought that we might need to reconsider the direction we have been going with our lives or with the life of our church fellowship. This natural inertia can be a good and stabilizing fact of life most of the time. But sometimes we hold on too tightly, and we need your help to be able to loosen our grip on things as they are, and open our minds and hearts to new possibilities that you want us to consider. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the honor of being called to a life of service in the Way of our servant master, Jesus the Christ, who invites us to join him in lighting the way to a world that honors all people with dignity, justice, mercy, equity, and compassion. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Worship Prompts Based on the Psalm of the Day, Psalm 2:

CALL TO WORSHIP

Happy are those who take refuge in the Lord (Psalm 2:12d). Let us worship God.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Ask the Lord and he will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. (Psalm 2:8). Let us confess our sin and brokenness to God.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING

The Lord shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalm 2:9). Good News! We are forgiven and made whole in Jesus Christ. Amen.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS

Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet (Psalm 2:11, 12a). Let us bring our gifts for the mission of Christ's church.

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 20, 2022

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, Bartlesville, OK

“Building Life by Doing Words”

Luke 6:46-49

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 28:14-22

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPAL READING

(A Teaching Moment – to be presented by the person who reads the principal text)

Perhaps you noticed in the Old Testament reading from Isaiah that the corrupt rulers, priests, and prophets of Israel were taken to task for making bargains with some of the powerful nations around them rather than building their own nation upon the foundation stone that God had laid in their midst, the foundation of God’s word of truth, righteousness, and peace as set forth in the gift of God’s law. And perhaps you also noticed the warning that regardless of the bargains that Israel’s leadership had made with the ways of the world and the international intrigues that always lead to death and destruction, the scourge whether it be war, famine, disease, or a swarm of locusts, will not bypass them. There can be no escaping the storms and floods of life. Only the nation that is built on the foundation stone of God’s law will be able to withstand the scourge when it comes. Well, that pretty well sums up the message of our New Testament lesson as well.

With respect to where we are in the worship calendar, the New Testament reading for today is part of a series of readings, during the Sundays after Epiphany, from the Gospel of Luke that recount the early part of Jesus’ ministry, after having attended to Jesus’ birth and infancy during the Sundays around Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. This reading is from Luke’s account of “the sermon on the plain” which in many ways is similar to Matthew’s account of the “sermon on the mount.” But there are also significant differences between Matthew’s account and Luke’s. Matthew pictures one man building his house on a stretch of level sand which turns out to be a dry creek bed

while the other man labors much harder to build his house on higher ground, a rough and rocky place where it could not be so easily washed away by the spring rains and high waters. But Luke was not a Palestinian like Matthew. He was a man of Macedonia who joined Paul's 2nd missionary journeys at Troas, and his 3rd journey at Philippi. Luke, not so familiar with the geography of Palestine, simply pictures one man building his house right on top of the ground while the other man digs down to bedrock and lays a foundation and builds a house that can withstand the storms and floods. So, it is possible that Matthew and Luke with their differing geographical and cultural backgrounds are just presenting two different versions of the same teaching occasion in Jesus' life and ministry.

On the other hand, we should remember that Jesus was a traveling charismatic wisdom teacher. He traveled up and down Palestine—from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south, and then back up to Galilee, and back down to Judea, and back up to Galilee, and back down to Judea many times—passing through Samaria on each journey. So, it is quite possible that Matthew in the sermon on the mount and Luke in the sermon on the plain, rather than presenting 2 different versions of the same teaching occasion were actually presenting accounts of 2 separate teaching occasions at 2 separate sites. And we know that traveling teachers do give essentially the same lessons from time to time and place to place. But we also know that the very best teachers never give exactly the same lecture in exactly the same way in two different venues and on two different occasions, just as an honest preacher never presents exactly the same sermon in the same way when recycling an oldie but goodie for a new occasion and a new audience.

But, be that as it may, whether the sermon on the mount and the sermon on the plain are different accounts of one occasion or reports of two different occasions, when it comes to the reading for today, the parable of the wise and foolish builders of houses, there is one thing that

both Matthew's account in "the sermon on the mount" and Luke's account in the "sermon on the plain" make absolutely clear: There is no way to avoid, prevent, or escape the storms and floods of life. "Into each life some rain must fall" – and sometimes it seems that too much is falling in mine – or yours – or ours – or theirs. The only option is to try and build our lives in such a way and in such a place and on such a foundation that we will be able to withstand and survive the storms and floods that come to us.

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Here now is the reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 6, Verses 46-49. Listen for what the Spirit may be saying to you, to me, to this church, to the church universal, and to the world in this reading from the Sermon on the Plain.

“Building Life by Doing Words”
(a divisional sermon that begins in narrative plotting style, and exhibits
some elements of a dialogical style of address)
Luke 6:46-49

Opener: THINGS FALL APART—STUFF HAPPENS

“On Thursday, June 24, 2021, at approximately 1:25 in the morning, **Champlain Towers South**, a 12-story beachfront condominium in the Miami suburb of Surfside, Florida, partially collapsed.

Ninety-eight people died.

Four people were rescued from the rubble, but one died of injuries shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Eleven others were injured.

Approximately 35 were rescued the same day from the uncollapsed portion of the building, which was demolished 10 days later.

...

The main contributing factor under investigation is long term degradation of reinforced concrete structural support in the ground-level parking garage under the housing units, due to water penetration and corrosion of the reinforcing steel.

...

Other possible factors include land subsidence, insufficient reinforcing steel and human corruption during construction. (Abstracted from *Wikipedia. Org*, accessed 1-10-22)

And then there’s this:

San Francisco’s *Millennium Tower*, one of the glitziest residential buildings in the city, *now tilting* more than two feet north and west and continues to tilt at a rate of three inches a year because it’s sinking into the ground.

In fact, it has already sunk between 17 and 18 inches.

If the problem isn’t fixed, the building could *eventually tilt* 40 inches, the maximum it needs (or can withstand) to function and most probably for the elevators and plumbing to work. (Accessed via internet in January 2022 and abstracted from *Architectural Digest*, 1-10-2022)

And then, of course, there was the great Bartlesville flood of 1986.

Millions of dollars of damage was done to buildings, vehicles, and other equipment in and around the downtown area of Bartlesville and other low-lying areas of the city; as well as upriver and downriver from here, and thousands of residents were evacuated as the waters continued to rise.

Some observers blamed the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers for moving slowly in opening its myriad flood gates during the flood of 1986. (Adapted from *Tulsa World* article of 10-1-2006 - the 20th anniversary of the flood)

Some of you who lived here at that time will remember how serious the damage was to various types of structures; whether floodplain maps were redrawn after the flood so that some structures that were not built in a designated floodplain zone are now declared to be in one.

And you will know about whether real estate development zones and building codes were redrafted to require such things as that water retention basin on the north side of this building complex.

Those three disastrous contemporary examples, the *Champlain Towers* Collapse in Surfside, Florida, the leaning *Millennium Tower* of San Francisco, and the great Bartlesville flood of 1986, certainly dramatize the fact that the matter of building wisely or foolishly is just as real today as it was in Jesus' time.

But, of course, nowadays we tend to think about the responsibility of developers and building contractors, and city planners and various governmental agencies to respect building codes and flood plain maps.

Yet, if you as an individual are having a home or a commercial building constructed, you had better do your own due diligence to see that all the appropriate standards of site selection and construction are met.

I. WHOA! WHAT WAS JESUS ABOUT?

But wait a minute.

What am I doing here now and what was I thinking when I did my internet research for the

opening part of this sermon?

What are *we* doing here and what are *we* thinking about right now

And, more importantly, what was Jesus thinking and what was Jesus doing when he told this story, this parable, about the wise and foolish builders—

The strong foundation and the weak foundation, according to Luke's account; or the building site on high ground and the building site in the creek bed, according to Matthew's account?

Was Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter and son of a carpenter intending to instruct his students in the basics of site selection and foundation laying for building their houses?

Or do you suppose for one minute that Jesus the Christ, the divine God incarnate, intended to get Bible students 2000 years later to get serious about building codes, and tornado shelters and hurricane forecasts and flood plain maps, and individual due diligence in housing and commercial construction?

Of course not!

Jesus only describes the example of a wise builder and a foolish builder in order to paint a word picture of what?!

A picture of what one is like who comes to him and hears his words gladly, and acts upon them.

And what one is like who comes to him and hears his words gladly, but does not continue in his words to act upon them and to build one's life upon them.

Whether you build your life like the foolish man who built his house poorly without even laying a good foundation or you are like the wise man who dug down to bedrock and built well by first establishing a solid foundation, there is one thing you can depend on:

You cannot build your life in such a way as to avoid or escape all the storms and floods that will surely come to try and disrupt or end your life.

It's not a matter of escaping or avoiding.

It's a matter of building our life in such a way as to be able to withstand and deal with the occasional pounding and the steady erosion by life's storms and floods.

II. THE STORMS AND FLOODS OF LIFE

What then are the storms and floods of life, some of which will inevitably come to each of us?

I'm going to list 5 or 6 types or categories of the kinds of storms and floods of life, some of which will surely come to each and all of us.

I could give you an example under each category of some challenge or difficulty that I have experienced myself or an example that I have observed in an acquaintance or a friend or a close loved one.

But I'm not going to give you such particular examples.

Rather, I'm going to have a brief pause after each category, and ask you to think of a particular experience that you have had under that heading or that you have observed in an acquaintance, a friend, or a member of your close family or extended family.

First category: Tensions, conflicts, alienation, breakdowns of good relationships with people we care about.

Think of a time when you experienced a life-challenge of that sort, or a situation you observed in someone else.

(PAUSE)

Second category: Financial catastrophes, business losses and failures, disillusionment in our life's work and employment.

Think of an example you have experienced or observed.

(PAUSE)

Third category: Trials, tribulations, disappointments and sometimes tragedies when it comes to the bringing forth and rearing children.

Think of an example you have experienced or observed.

(PAUSE)

Fourth category: Coming face to face with dread disease or crippling accidents in ourselves or in our loved ones.

(PAUSE)

Fifth category: The loss of parents, children, siblings or spouses by death, especially when at an untimely age.

Think!

(PAUSE)

Sixth category: Wars and rumors of wars, recession, inflation, famine, pestilence, and pandemic.

Try for just a moment *not* to think about it – and lotsa’ luck with that.

(PAUSE)

All of these are some of the possible storms and floods of life, and nobody escapes them all.

III. BUILDING LIFE BY DOING THE WORDS

And so, how can we build our lives well, starting with a bedrock foundation and careful construction, and continuing with an everyday maintenance discipline, so as to withstand the inevitable storms and floods of life?

The simple answer to that question is, of course, by doing the words of Jesus.

Not merely hearing the words or saying the words or studying the words or knowing the words or learning the words or teaching the words or preaching the words or repeating the words, but by doing the words of Jesus.

And what, specifically, are the action words of Jesus that we must do in order to be building our lives on a bedrock foundation and with sturdy construction?

There is an excellent sample and summary of Jesus’ action words to be found in some of the verses just preceding the parable of the two builders.

This is part of the “sermon on the plain” in Luke’s Gospel which has some things in common with the “sermon on the mount” in Matthew’s Gospel, but Luke’s account is quite a bit shorter in this instance.

Now, I’ve made a list of 10 action commands of Jesus in the sermon on the plain.

But some of those statements are very much entangled with the ancient context of Palestine under Roman occupation forces.

The people of Israel in Jesus’ time not only had their loving but sometimes cantankerous neighbors and family members to deal with, but there were actually foreign soldiers on the street who could be very kind and accommodating or they could at times be very demanding,

unreasonable and abusive.

So, I have selected just 2 of those 10 statements so that I can follow each one with a brief paraphrase to put Jesus' wise counsel more in terms of our present day political and cultural context.

Listen meditatively to these action words of Jesus so that you may be able to reflect on what you would need to change in your life to be doing these words and, therefore, building or rebuilding and maintaining your life on the rock foundation of doing the words of Jesus, building it strongly so as to withstand and deal with the storms and floods of life.

First action statement:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28).

But since you don't have enemy soldiers on the street who could hassle you, listen to my paraphrase.

Paraphrase:

Love those who oppose your efforts and whose plans you oppose.

And love those who disagree with your ideas and beliefs and with whose ideas and beliefs you disagree.

Show an interest in the plans and ideas of your opponents.

Be respectful, caring, and courteous.

Try to find out where in their life experience they are coming from

Try to identify and acknowledge an experience, a concern, or a hope that you have in common with them.

Now, think for a moment.

What changes would you need to make in your attitude and behavior in order to be doing this word of Jesus, to love your enemies, that is, those who oppose you or disagree with you.

(PAUSE)

Second action statement:

“If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away

your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again” (Luke 6:29-30).

Once more: since we don’t have occupation forces roaming our streets, let’s paraphrase Jesus’ words.

Paraphrase:

Whether at home with your family or at your place of employment or volunteer service, or in the public marketplace: if anyone comes across to you as having unreasonable expectations or making unreasonable demands or speaks to you in a way that seems insulting, disrespectful, dismissive or hurtful, just go ahead and do as they request or expect.

Wait for a calmer, less agitated, time to let them know a little bit of the hurt and offense that you have felt.

Think now.

What changes would you need to make in your disposition and responses in order to be doing the words of Jesus.

(PAUSE)

Here’s another paraphrase: “Why do you call me Master Teacher, Master Teacher, and do not act on my instructions? (Luke 6:46).

Concl. IDENTIFYING WITH CHRIST: OUR LENTEN PILGRIMAGE

Doing the words of Jesus steadily and consistently in our daily life is certainly not an easy way to live and behave.

And I believe it is clear that no one can do the words of Jesus without first being identified with Jesus in the surrender and sacrifice of his Cross as well as the victory of his resurrection.

And that’s part of what we need to be about during this Lenten season which begins a week from Wednesday, on March the second.

Approaching the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ at Easter, so that we might die once again to all the inner barriers and compulsions that keep cropping up in our hearts to keep us from doing his words.

Each one of us will have to make a deliberate and active effort of it, using our Sunday services and our daily devotions to help us make the necessary changes in our hearts and in our practices to be doing the words of Christ more truly and more faithfully.

Perhaps some of us can make use of this folder of DAILY EPISTLE READINGS FOR LENT 2022.

The scripture quotations on the front cover can set the tone.

Doing the words of Jesus consistently is definitely not easy for any of us, as I think you know very well.

But we are in good company in this daily struggle.

We may be encouraged by remembering that the same Paul who wrote in Galatians—the second passage on the cover of this leaflet,

“I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” also wrote in Romans Chapter 7,

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...Now if I do what I do not want...it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me...Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And if you decide to use this guide for daily reading and reflection during Lent, here’s an exercise you might consider:

The scripture selections are almost all from Paul’s letters of counsel to the Christian congregation in Corinth, a church with many internal and external problems and struggles if ever there was one.

So, as you read these passages, feel free to examine Paul’s performance.

How well does Paul do in his advice to the Corinthian church in exhibiting the spirit of the Christ within him?

And how well does Paul do in showing that he has been crucified and resurrected with Christ, that Christ truly does live within him and he in Christ?

And as you put Paul to the test, don't forget to put yourself to the test. Amen.

(Go to the baptismal font to lead in the affirmation of faith, using the baptismal confession known as "The Apostles' Creed")

Let us stand and affirm the faith of our baptism, saying the Apostles' Creed.

(The text of the printed handout of daily Epistle readings for Lent referenced in the sermon Conclusion above follows here on the next four pages.)

DAILY EPISTLE READINGS FOR LENT 2022

Prologue

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it (Luke 9:23-24).

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:19b-20).

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

Ash Wednesday, 3-2-22: Hebrews 12:1-14

Thursday Philippians 3:12-21

Friday Philippians 4:1-9

Saturday Philippians 4:10-20

First Week of Lent

Sunday Hebrews 2:10-18

Monday 1 Corinthians 1:1-19

Tuesday 1 Corinthians 1:20-31

Wednesday 1 Corinthians 2:1-13

Thursday 1 Corinthians 2:14 — 3:15

Friday 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Saturday 1 Corinthians 4:1-8

Second Week of Lent

Sunday Romans 6:1-14

Monday 1 Corinthians 4:8-21

Tuesday 1 Corinthians 4:1-8

Wednesday 1 Corinthians 5:9 — 6:11

Thursday 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Friday 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

Saturday 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

Third Week of Lent

Sunday Romans 8:1-8

Monday 1 Corinthians 7:25-31

Tuesday 1 Corinthians 7:32-40

Wednesday 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Thursday 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

Friday 1` Corinthians 9:15-27

Saturday 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Fourth Week of Lent

Sunday	Romans 8:9-25
Monday	1 Corinthians 10:14 — 11:1
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 11:2-34
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 12:1-11
Thursday	1 Corinthians 12:12-26
Friday	1 Corinthians 12:27 — 13:3
Saturday	1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Fifth Week of Lent

Sunday	Romans 12:1-21
Monday	1 Corinthians 14:1-19
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 14:20-40
Wednesday	2 Corinthians 2:14 — 3:6
Thursday	2 Corinthians 3:7-18
Friday	2 Corinthians 4:1-12
Saturday	2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Holy Week

Palm/Passion Sunday	1 Timothy 6:11-16
Monday	2 Corinthians 1:1-7
Tuesday	2 Corinthians 1:8-22
Wednesday	2 Corinthians 2:23 — 2:11
Maundy Thursday	1 Corinthians 10:14-17
Good Friday	1 Peter 1:10-21
Holy Saturday	Hebrews 4:1-16
Easter	John 1:1-18

The above reading list is from the “Daily Lectionary” which provides three readings for each day, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel, on pages 391-419 of *Daily Prayer: The Worship of God: Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5* published by The Westminster Press, Philadelphia in 1987 @ \$9.75 each. The book is out of print, but a new copy is on sale via Amazon.com for \$82.44. A few used copies in “good” condition are available @ \$5.00 and up. A person would not have much use for the first 390 pages of the book unless serving as the daily worship director of a cloistered religious community, i.e., a Presbyterian monastery or convent!

Fortunately, there is a smaller book available that contains only the daily readings. It is *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings: Consultation on Common Texts* published by the Fortress Press. Kindle \$30.00, Paperback \$32.14. Some used from \$11.95.

(The following print instructions are in reference to the original version of this handout or bulletin insert which was formatted for printing in landscape orientation on 8.5” X 11.5” paper.)

To internet recipients: You can print this church bulletin style folder in one go if your printer has the option to Print on Both Sides. Tell it to Print on Both Sides and Flip paper on the short edge.

If your printer does not have those options, you can print on Both Sides by printing side 1, then (typically) you can put the paper back in the feed tray just as it came out without turning it over or turning it around and print side 2.

LITURGICAL ACCOMPANYMENTS TO:

“Building Life by Doing Words”

Luke 6:46-49

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 28:14-22

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 3

1. Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Principal Preaching Text or Theme:

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O God, we love to hear the words of scripture read from both Old and New Testaments because we believe that the living Word, Jesus Christ, will meet us in these written words. Grant, by the light of your Spirit, that as we read these words of wisdom for the living of this life, we may truly become doers of the word and not hearers only. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER: CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Come to think of it, Lord God, it seems that when we read or hear your words but fail to do your words, we become vulnerable to destructive forces and destructive thoughts within and around us. Forgive us this lack of integrity, and change our hearts by the power of your Word and Spirit, so that we might change our minds and build or remodel our lives by integrating our doing with our hearing and speaking. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for your Word, your Spirit, and your providence that have sustained us through the past storms and losses of this life. And thank you for your words and your Word to guide us as we continue to build and maintain the kind of lives that can cope constructively with the further floods and losses that are sure to come our way. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. Worship Prompts Based on the Psalm of the Day, Psalm 3:

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord is a shield around us, our glory, and the one who lifts up our heads. We cry aloud to the

Lord, and he answers us from his holy hill (Psalm 3:3-4). Let us worship God.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Deliverance belongs to the Lord (Psalm 3:8a). Let us confess our sin and brokenness to God.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING

Rise up, O Lord! Deliver us, Our God (Psalm 3:7a). Good News! We are made righteous in Jesus Christ. Amen.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS

We lie down and sleep; we wake again. For the Lord sustains us. We are not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against us all around (Psalm 3:5-6). Let us bring our gifts for the mission of Christ's church.

3. Special Music Opportunity

When this sermon was preached, our church choir was inactive due to the covid pandemic. Otherwise I might have asked the choir director if they would present the calypso arrangement of "Hosanna, We Build a House, Oh" a building trades work song from Jamaica: "House built on a weak foundation will not stand, Oh no, Oh no" and "House built on a strong foundation, it will stand, Oh yes, Oh yes." But there being no active choir, I had the Harry Belafonte recording of the song played as a special musical interlude in the service following the sermon and the affirmation of faith.

After the service, one of the vocal music leaders in our congregation told me about a children's song that I had never heard even though I thought I knew all of the Vacation Bible School and Sunday School songs: "The Wise Man and The Foolish Man" by Herman Voss. The first two verses have the children doing hand motions when the rain comes tumbling down and the floods come up. The house on the rock stands firm in the first verse and the house on the sand goes CRASH! in the second verse and the children fall to the ground. And there is an important third verse: "So build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ, For the word of God is sure."

So, if I should ever preach from a refurbished edition of this sermon manuscript, I would hope to have the Calypso song as a special musical offering at some point before the sermon and the children's song at some point after the sermon. For the Caribbean work song is all about building houses with the application to the building of life being implicit, while the children's song declares the application to the building of life explicitly. That order of presenting the two musical offerings is the same as the homiletical plot of the sermon: first the image of house-building, second the application to life-building.

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time (9th Sunday after Pentecost)
First Presbyterian Church, Independence, KS

July 25, 2021

“The Apple of the Eye”

Luke 15:11-32

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:10

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 4

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPAL READING

(A Teaching Moment – to be presented by the person who reads the principal text)

The last verse in the Old Testament lesson that was read went like this: “He sustained him (meaning Jacob/Israel) in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; he shielded him as the apple of his eye.”

Perhaps you noticed that expression “apple of the eye.” That expression appears four times in the Bible, all of them in the Old Testament, once in Deuteronomy, Chapter 32, once in Psalm 17, once in Proverbs, Chapter 7, and once in Zechariah, Chapter 2.

But, of course, the image “apple of the eye” is still in conversational use today, and we all have an idea of what that expression means and how it is used nowadays.

That expression does not appear in the New Testament.

But consider the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

We are all familiar with that parable and many of us have heard it referred to as the Parable of the Loving Father. And perhaps some of us are also aware of the interpretation that the younger son, the prodigal, is a stand-in for the Gentiles, the people of all the “other” nations whom Jesus would include in the promise of the new kingdom of God; while the elder son, the “good” boy is a stand-in for the Jews, many of whom are jealous and outraged that Jesus would associate with and welcome those dirty old Gentiles who have not been living according to the

all-important moral and ritual laws attributed to Moses.

But, for today, as we read this familiar story again, think about this question:

Which son is the apple of the loving father's eye?

The younger son who rebelled, ran away, and wasted his life?

Or the elder son who stayed at home and worked the family business as a responsible adult?

Or could it be that both sons, and indeed, the whole family is the apple of the father's eye?

Hear now the reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, Verses 11-32.

“The Apple of the Eye”
(A divisional sermon structured as the development of an image)
Luke 15:11-32

Opener: A STRIKING IMAGE

One day some weeks ago, our family devotional at the breakfast table included the reading of this verse in the prophet Zechariah, in which God is addressing the nation of Israel:

For thus said the LORD of hosts...regarding the nations that plundered you: Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye (Zechariah 2:8).

When Mary Lou finished reading the scheduled passage aloud, for it was her turn to read, she said, “I’ll bet that apple of my eye is a modern translation.”

And I said “Yeah, that’s probably *not* a *literal* translation.”

By the way, we use the Daily Lectionary as a guide for our breakfast table devotional Bible reading.

It’s kind of like the Sunday Lectionary, only it has suggested readings for every day of the week instead of just for Sunday.

The Daily Lectionary can be seen on the last 25 pages of (I hold up the tattered book) this resource: *Daily Prayer* published by the Presbyterian Church in 1987.

But, getting back to the Apple of the Eye in the Old Testament: it turns out that Mary Lou and I were right in thinking that apple of the eye is not a strictly literal translation of the Hebrew.

But we were wrong in thinking that it was a rather modern or contemporary translation.

Apple of the eye in the Bible goes back as far as some of the earliest English translations of the Bible, including the King James Version of 1611.

And it goes back even earlier than that in general English literature, including a mention in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, a play first produced in 1600.

Here it is in Shakespeare’s play.

(Oberon is speaking to one of the lady’s frustrated suitors.)

Hit with Cupid’s archery,

Sink in apple of his eye.
When his love he doth espy,
Let her shine as gloriously.
As Venus of the sky.

“Hit with Cupid’s archery, Sink in apple of his eye.”

I gather that the *apple* of the eye is the part of the eye that cupid’s arrow is likely to pierce when the one that you love comes into view.

So, the transfer was inevitable: from the arrow of love piercing you in the apple of your eye when you see the one whom you love to the one whom you love *being* the apple of your eye.

But, when it comes to the places where apple of the eye shows up in the Bible we have to keep in mind that the English Bible is a translation from the Hebrew.

A literal translation of the Hebrew would probably be something like the pupil of the eye or the aperture of the eye or the lens of the eye.

So, it might be fair for us to wonder how it came about that the translators did not use a technical term like pupil or lens or aperture rather than the poetic and metaphorical image, apple of the eye.

Well, think about this: *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream* was first produced at Stratford on Avon in 1600.

The Protestant King James Bible was published eleven years later and the Roman Catholic Douay/Rheims translation was not far behind.

So, go figure!

Don’t you think it’s possible that some of those Bible translators might have actually seen a production of the play and been influenced by Shakespeare’s use of the apple of the eye image in connection with the emotion of amorous love?

Anyhow, that means that there are two ways that we can think of the people of Israel as the apple of God’s eye.

I. FIRST WAY: THE FAVORED ONE

First, of course, it is fair to say that, according to the witness of the Bible, Israel is *the* nation in which God delights.

Certainly, the passage in Deuteronomy that was read makes clear that God chose, or rather created and raised up, Israel for that express purpose, to be the apple of God's eye—to be God's own selected portion from among the nations of the world, to be the people in whom God delights and takes pride in the beauty of God's own creation or offspring, God's own children.

Well, we all know what the apple of the eye means in our own families, or in a nearby family that we know very well.

A mother or a father may have multiple children and will surely claim to love them all equally.

But there may also be one child in whom that parent appears to take especial delight and pleasure.

There's just a mutual sparkle in their eyes, a chemistry, a connection, and an enchantment that cannot be hidden.

I think of the loving father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.

Was the younger son who went off and spent his share of the estate in riotous living the apple of his father's eye?

The elder son seemed to think so when the loving father threw a big party to celebrate the return of the prodigal.

But listen to the loving father's words to his angry and jealous elder son:

"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:31).

Well, of course the loving father loved the elder son also.

But, clearly, there must have been something special between the loving father and the prodigal younger son.

II. SECOND WAY: THE LENS

And that leads us to the second way that the expression apple of the eye may have meaning with respect to the nation of Israel, and for us.

The person who is the apple of your eye may very well be the person who embodies the way that you want to see people in general.

The person who is the apple of your eye may be the lens through which you want to see reality, the aperture through which light comes into your being and enables you to form in your mind a picture of the goodness and beauty that you see in life and in the world, the loving-kindness that you aspire to experience in all of your relationships with other people and with all of God's creation.

In the case of the prodigal, perhaps the loving father saw an example, a personification of the fact that people sometimes make mistakes, do self-defeating and self-destructive things.

And when people disappoint us and bring trouble onto themselves by bad choices and hurtful actions, they need the love, the understanding, the forgiveness, the patience, and the acceptance of the people who love them and whom they may have hurt or disappointed or alienated.

Of course, the elder son needed love and acceptance and understanding too, because he had serious problems of his own – his self-righteousness, his legalism, his judgmental spirit, his jealousy, and his mistake of thinking that he had earned his father's love rather than recognizing that his father's love was a gift of grace that would always be there.

But it was the younger son who had screwed things up so bad that it was more obvious that the nature of the father's love had to be by the father's grace rather than by the son's merit.

So, it may be correct to say that the younger and more rebellious son was the apple of the father's eye in the sense that it was the younger son who furnished the father with a lens or an aperture, an app-le as it were, through which the father could more readily see how things are supposed to work in all of our relationships with people and with everything in this God-created world.

If the loving father appeared to take especial delight in the rebellious younger son, it was because the younger son provided him with a lens through which to look upon every relationship

in this hurting and broken world where we live.

III. THE WHOLE FAMILY OF THE LOVING FATHER

Yet, on the other hand, what if the loving father claims, as so many of us do, that he has no favorites among his children?

What if the loving father says that the apple of his eye is his whole family, including his loving spouse, the younger more adventurous, run-away son, the elder stay-at-home, more dependable son and whatever other sons and daughters the couple may have?

Who are we to say that the loving father cannot have his whole family as the apple of his eye, that in which he finds his greatest delight and sense of fulfillment in life?

After all, doesn't the Bible tell us that God has a whole nation of wildly different children as the apple of God's eye?

And doesn't the Bible also make it clear that God's special love for the one nation Israel was intended as a sign of God's love for all people and for the whole world?

The parable of the Prodigal son is really the parable of the loving father.

It reveals the father's deep love for both the elder stay-at-home son and the younger run-away son.

The apple of the father's eye is his whole family.

The whole family is the lens through which the father sees the world and the great joy and fulfillment which can be had in God's great creation.

And don't we all recognize family as the ideal heart of a fulfilled life, even if we have had major disappointments and heartbreaks in that department.?!

Of course, some people do prefer living alone, sometimes out of necessity and sometimes by choice related to some personality trait or some all-consuming pursuit or ambition.

And let's not exclude the unconventional families that have always been part of the fabric of human society—the family that is anchored in grandparents raising grandchildren, or a solo parent with or without the live-in help of a grandparent or aunt or uncle.

And, of course, the even less traditional family structures coming into greater social acceptance at this time give further evidence of the near universal high value placed upon family as the basic social structure for anchoring our lives as human beings.

IV. GOD'S SPECIAL FAMILY FOR GOD'S UNIVERSAL FAMILY

And so, with the often troublesome and confusing notion that God chose Israel out of all the nation/families of the world to be the apple God's eye, to be a people after God's own heart, much as it was said that David was a man after God's own heart.

Many people have echoed the old saw, "How odd of God to choose the Jews."

But the Bible makes it clear that God did not choose Israel because of any greatness or any good qualities of any kind that God saw in the Israelite people.

On the contrary, God actually created the people of Israel beginning with the call and promises to the patriarch Abraham, a call and promises that were renewed with Abraham's son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob and thence to Jacob's twelve sons who became the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Built right into God's call and promises to Israel was the assurance that Israel would be a blessing, and a light to all the nations and an instrument through which God would draw all people to God's self.

Thus did God create a lens, an aperture, a pupil of the eye, an app-le through which to see all peoples and all of nature and the whole cosmos in the kind of relationship that God intended to have with all that God had made.

And, of course, it surely follows, that if God loved the people of Israel into being as a lens, an aperture through which God could look upon all people and his whole creation with favor and delight, purpose and promise, grace and justice, love and compassion, then surely God has also loved the church of Jesus Christ into being for the same purpose.

If God has kept Israel and the Jews as the apple of God's eye through all kinds of struggles and prodigal rebellions, corrupt leadership both civil and religious, self-righteous judgementalism, legalism, and failures of compassion and justice for the poor; then, surely, it is

also God's will and plan and purpose to keep the Christian fellowship as the apple of God's eye.

And if that be true, then it must also follow that some response of thankfulness and obedience on our part is in order.

How, then, should we respond to this gracious gift of being kept as the apple of God's eye?

Closer: GOD'S WISDOM & WORD THE APPLE OF OUR EYE

Perhaps a starting place is to realize that we must find the answer to that question anew every day of our lives.

A thankful and obedient response to the gift of being kept as the apple of God's eye begins by making God's wisdom, God's Word and God's teachings the apple of our eye.

The apple-of-the-eye passage in the book of Proverbs goes like this. (This is God speaking through lady wisdom):

"My child, keep my words and store up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live, keep my teachings as the apple of your eye" (Proverbs 7:1-2).

Now, there's the switch, the changeup.

Instead of asking God to keep us as the apple of God's eye, God, in the person of lady wisdom, is asking us to keep God's teachings as the apple of our eye.

And I see that as an affirmation of the Christian practice of daily Bible reading.

We need to read the Bible every day to keep God's teachings, God's wisdom, God's Spirit, God's good news of grace and love, mercy and justice, responsibility and compassion as the apple of our eye; that through which we find the goodness, beauty, and delight in life, and a lens or aperture through which we see the world and life as God would have us see.

Now when I talk about the Christian practice of daily Bible reading, I am not talking about Bible study.

Bible study is important too.

If you participate in Christian worship, fellowship and service and you do not also participate in a Sunday school class or a Bible study group, you need to ask yourself why not.

But I'm not talking about Bible study right now.

I'm talking about daily Bible reading in a devotional context of prayer and meditation.

The passage that you read for devotional meditation and prayer at the start of the day should, by all means, be a short passage, short enough that you can focus on a word or a thought on which to reflect and meditate through the day.

Besides the Presbyterian Daily Lectionary that we use in our home there are various Bible reading schedules as well as daily devotional guides that have a scripture passage and a brief meditation on application to daily living in the Way of Christ.

But you could also just choose a book of the Bible and read a paragraph or two each day and identify a word or thought or question for meditation as you go through your day.

And, of course, this doesn't have to be a family routine – you can do this alone.

I myself do it both ways.

And here's something that's very important to remember:

If the passage you are reading for the day is troublesome or hard to understand or it raises questions about the modern ethical or moral aspects of some action ordered by God, that is not necessarily an invitation to do further research and study on it, as you would do in a Bible *study* context.

But in a devotional Bible *reading* context, the hard passage or the questions raised may be an invitation to welcome the great *mystery* of God into your life anew for this day.

An opportunity to live this day with a sense of dependence on the Divine Presence, who is far beyond your full understanding but who is always with you and is completely reliable.

A Spiritual Presence whom you will not understand completely, but who may very well grasp you and guide your steps; support you, and renew your strength, and revive your spirit. Amen.

LITURGICAL ACCOMPANYMENTS TO:

“The Apple of the Eye”

Luke 15:11-32

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:10

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 4

1. Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Principal Preaching Text or Theme:

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit. Grant that as the scriptures are read, we may once again experience this book as the lens through which we may see this life and this world most truly. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that sometimes we have allowed the natural desire for approval to become an uncontrolled craving, to the extent that truth and honesty have slipped away. At other times we have fallen into the game of playing favorites to the extent of being unfair toward some of your children in our own circle of family, friends and associates. Forgive us our casual neglect and inattentiveness. And help us to learn how to truly treasure and respect all people, not only in our own inner circle, but also in your larger circle of the whole human family. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, for raising up a nation of your own people to be the apple of your eye, the lens through which you see all people and all nations as destined to acknowledge and honor you. And thank you for calling us in Jesus Christ to be your church, to be the other lens of your binocular vision, the apple of your other eye, called to complete the vision of your fulfilled kingdom in which all peoples and nations shall honor you and enjoy the gifts of your law and your gospel, subject to both your judgment and your mercy. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. Worship Prompts Based on the Psalm of the Day, Psalm 4:

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when we call to him (Psalm 4:3). Let us worship God.

CALL TO CONFESSION

How long, you people, shall the Lord's honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies (Psalm 4:2). Let us confess our sin and brokenness to God.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING

:

We may lie down and sleep in peace; for God alone, the Lord, makes us lie down in safety (Psalm 4:8). Good news! We are forgiven and made whole in Jesus Christ. Amen.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS:

Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord (Psalm 4:5). Let us bring gifts for the mission of Christ's church.

BOOK I NOTES

1. (This note is indicated in Chapter III, ¶ 4.) Examples of philosophy as language analysis and the function of language analysis in textual interpretation can be seen in Allen and Springsted's 2007, 218-223, discussion of Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "language games;" Langer's 1993 discussion of symbolic meaning as the genius and power of human language; Wheelwright's 1954 discussion of stenic and tensive language; Zuurdeeg's 1958 discussion of religious language, literature, and lore related to belief in God; and Borg's 2001 and 2003 historical/metaphorical/sacred approach to biblical interpretation.

2. (This note is indicated in Chapter III, ¶ 37.) Diogenes Allen 1989, 149-164, discusses Reason and Revelation with respect to the following items:

- Revelation in the Bible is not a one-way street but is interactive and leads to a tradition largely enshrined in sacred scripture;
- According to the spiritual/theological fathers in early Christian history, revelation is above reason since the Christian biblical understanding of God and divine intention in the concreteness of the peoples' history cannot be found by an examination of the physical universe and cannot be detected with nearly as much clarity and fulness by examination of the history of other peoples;
- Our will and our intellect in relation to ancient and modern philosophies and in relation to God's intentions and human response;
- Human seeking and God's intentions in relation to revelation and faith being above reason;
- Reason and decision-making in matters of revelation, faith, thoughts about God, and experience of God;
- Our response to and decisions about the claims of Christianity;
- Humans seeking our own well-being and discovering/claiming/embracing the good that God has for us;
- Human discoveries, actions, and decisions under the order of the body, under the order of the intellect, and under the order of the heart, respectively;
- Humans with hearts closed to the possibility of revelation and God and humans' ability to open the heart to the possibility of God and revelation;
- A parallel between Plato's use of both reason and myth in the apprehension of something ultimate, the good, that transcends the universe which, then, is not itself ultimate, and Christianity's use of both reason and faith in the perception of God as the ultimate which is not a member of the universe so that the universe itself is not ultimate;
- Faith seeking more understanding than is required to achieve a mature faith.
- A recognition by science and philosophy of the contingency (dependence on or relation to something outside itself) of the universe, and recognition of the help provided by Christianity

and other religions in understanding the contingency of the universe and help in perceiving a transcendent dimension in human life (That brings to mind the observation by the anthropologist Joseph Campbell that there seems to be evidenced in both ancient and modern cultures a universal sense of a transcendent dimension of reality and of human experience, and a desire to commune with the transcendent. It also brings to mind the spiritual journey and work of Marcus Borg and other postmodernist theologians in recovering a sense of the human capacity to experience the sacred, a something more than or beyond empirical evidence in the space/time material world, the concept of “the more” being attributed to James 1902.);

- Resistance to the historical critical study of the Bible, especially among Protestants due to our special relationship with the Bible;
- Problems for both scientifically minded people and theologically minded people due to the Bible’s dwelling on divine agency in nature and history;
- Recognizing the myths and legends of the Bible as having power and usefulness in revealing God’s intentions;
- Our affirmation of what science and history affirm and our affirmation of what the Bible reveals of God’s intentions;
- Wittgenstein’s observation about the insignificance of the formal discontinuities among the Gospel accounts and between them and the forms in science and nature when compared to the significance of the Gospel claim that God became a man;
- The notion that the possibility of human knowledge about the divine is limited to the place where the divine reveals itself to human perception, wherein an analogy from geometry is used; picture the realm of human knowledge as a plane and the realm of the divine as another intersecting plane, the intersection of the two planes being a straight line; humans can know about anything in the plane that represents the realm of human perception, but can only perceive or know that part of the divine plane along the straight line where the two planes intersect; that line represents analogically the locus of God’s revelation of God’s self and God’s intentions;
- An example of the above analogical limitation of human knowledge: historians do not dispute the biblical record of Jesus’ death, the longest section in all four gospels, even though there is no other record of how Jesus died. But the significance of his death is not accessible to historical enquiry because that significance depends on who it was that died; which humans can only know as God reveals it through the grace of faith (which I think clearly excludes the notion of the virgin birth as evidence of Jesus’ divine identity or origin);
- The fact that the mighty healing works of Jesus do not “prove” his incarnation, i.e., that he was God in human form or the expected divine son of man;
- The fact that science, which is the study of physical interactions, does not and cannot study divine creative action because God, who is not a member of the universe but is its source,

does not physically interact with the universe;

- The fact that the consideration of events in terms of divine providence does not ignore or set aside historical explanations based on human choices and on lawlike conditions such as geographic, economic, and social conditions;
- The effects of the Enlightenment on history writing, i.e., limitation of evidence considered to certain types of tangible data, increased collaboration and agreement among historians, exclusion of questions concerning the significance of events and human life because such questions are not subject to newly favored techniques that give desirable but limited results;
- The inconsistencies and crude supernaturalism of the four Gospels as the very genius of their effectiveness in reporting events at the intersection of the human plane and the divine plane;
- When an intellectual seeker of well-being through exploration of the Bible and association with a faith community comes sooner or later to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, it will not be because anything on the human plane makes that confession historically mandatory nor a commitment to Jesus as the divine one historically warranted;
- The assertion that faith is not a substitute for the absence of a historical warrant but a discernment of God's intentions by one who is interacting with God;
- The indispensability of historical study to Christianity since, according to an assertion by Ambrose of Milan (333-397), God has chosen to reveal his intentions for us through certain peoples, first Israel and then the Christian church, in the concreteness of their corporate lives rather than through dialectic (philosophical argument) as in the Neoplatonism which was strong among intellectuals in the Roman Empire of Ambrose's time;
- The assertion that Augustine, who in his pre-Christian pagan and Platonist days heard Ambrose preach/teach in Milan, impressed on Western civilization, via his *Confessions* and more especially his *The City of God*, his discovery of the reality of historical existence, with divine intentions being revealed and realized in the life of individuals, peoples, and nations, and entire civilizations; (This assertion along with Allen's refrains of "God who intends," "God as intending," and "divine intentions," brings to mind G. Ernest Wright's "God Who Acts" and Bultmann's "God as Acting.")
- The fact that during the Enlightenment (c. 1600-1800) when the foundations of the modern mentality were laid, there was a rejection of the historical nature of religion, and the historical nature of Christianity in particular;
- The assertions that "...Christianity is a historical religion because God's intentions are not locked into a never-changing natural order" ...and "God freely creates and freely calls people to realize divine intentions" and "It is by working with people that God enables people to find their well-being;"
- The assertion that "Because God has made divine intentions known to us in and through a particular people and above all a particular person, historical investigation, though limited, provides vital knowledge." (examples are given, such as knowledge of what a Pharisee is,

that the focus of the first six books of the Bible is the covenant of God with Abraham and not a focus on speculation concerning why we have a universe even though the Bible as we now have it begins with two creation stories, etc.);

- The assertion that the recovery of the Antiochene historical dimension lost in the four-fold approach of the Middle Ages (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic) by the Christian humanists of the Renaissance enables reading Paul's letters as addressed to particular churches; and that the historical approach wards off the rampant apocalypticism that periodically swept the church in the Middle Ages and continues in some Protestant churches that haven't learned to appreciate the value of a historical approach to the Bible (I note that Bonhoeffer 1972, 229-230, in his 9 March 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge, references a "worldliness" in 13th century thinking that seems a contrast to Allen's observation here, possibly stemming from the fact that Allen references a contribution of *Christian* humanism whereas Bonhoeffer references the fundamental concepts of humanism generally: humanity, tolerance, gentleness, and moderation (also referenced above in Chapter III [¶ 78] in relation to Bonhoeffer's tracing of the waxing and waning of a mature worldliness among the signal thinkers from classical antiquity through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the Modern period);
- A new intellectual openness to the biblical/Christian notion of a God who reveals his intentions through interaction with human beings since postmodern science and history have discredited the modern belief in a self-contained universe;
- The opportunity provided by an open universe to conceive of God's action in history and in a scientific world, which is the subject of the next chapter, "Divine Agency in a Scientific World."

3. (This note is indicated in Chapter IV, ¶ 40 and ¶ 62 and in Book II, Chapter II at 4. Season of Lent, ¶ 6.) A Wikipedia article on Neo-Orthodoxy, accessed April 18, 2024, indicates that Bultmann, who was associated with Barth and Brunner in the 1920's, was also strongly influenced by his former colleague at the University of Marburg, the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger. Bultmann's assertion that every scripture exegete works from some philosophical perspective or framework and should give an account of the philosophic concepts that guide their exegetical work got me wondering what philosophical framework guided the exegetical and general theological work of other major theologians of the 20th century. Were they all existentialists? Allen and Springsted 2007, 196-197, describe the situation at mid-twentieth century: "existentialism was the only contemporary philosophical current with which theology had any vital contact" while "the dominant philosophical movements in the twentieth century as far as the universities are concerned are phenomenology and analytic philosophy, not existentialism, noting that this situation prompted Paul Tillich to lament the circular conversation in which theologians read each other but are ignored by the rest of the intellectual world. And they (Allen and Springsted) note that "since the Second

World War...both phenomenology and analytic philosophy (I have mentioned David Buttrick's phenomenological approach to homiletic theology in n. 1 above) have had an influence on Christian theology..., a development that did not yet appear when Tillich lamented at mid-century. I also reference this further along in this Chapter IV [¶ 62], where I also mention Langer's 1993 [1942], 10-17, relegation of theology along with classical philosophy to the refuse pile of intellectual discards. The Wikipedia article states of the Neo-Orthodox theologians that "Some of them made use of existentialism" and that Reinhold Niebuhr and, to a lesser extent, the earlier work of Karl Barth "were influenced by the writings of Søren Kierkegaard," whom I understand is often considered "the father of existentialism," and who, writing under various pseudonyms, maintained that Christianity is beyond human understanding and "presents the individual with paradoxical choices" and that the decision to become a Christian is not fundamentally rational but passionate—a leap of faith. That perspective seems to reflect what is meant when Neo-Orthodoxy is referred to as dialectical theology, that is, according to dictionary.com, a form of neo-orthodox theology emphasizing the infinite tensions, paradoxes, and basic ambiguities inherent in Christian existence, and holding against rationalism, that God is unknowable to humans except through divine grace and revelation. This use of the word dialectical in a theological context stems from the philosophical work of Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) who emphasized the notion that any idea or thesis gives rise to a contrary or opposing idea or thesis, thus the dialecticism which is reflected in Kierkegaard's identification of the intellectual ambiguities and paradoxes which are apparent in Christian or any religious belief in a creator and providential God. It was on the basis of this dialectical perspective that Barth had no use for the natural theology of medieval scholastic philosophical theologians such as Thomas Aquinas which was adapted by the liberal theologians of the 19th century, while Emil Brunner still saw some usefulness of natural theology in his neo-orthodox theological work. Cullmann's 1949 (2018 reprint) suggested that the source of that dispute between Barth and Brunner might be connected with the early church development reflected already in the New Testament writings of formulating brief summaries of the essential elements of Christian belief (confessions or rules of faith), some of which mention God the Father first rather than mentioning Christ the Son first as the way to knowing the Father.

Paul Tillich, on the other hand, develops his version of neo-orthodox theology or, perhaps, neo-scholastic theology by articulating a correlation of orthodox Christian teachings including non-historical biblical narratives such as the creation accounts, the mighty works of Jesus, and apocalyptic eschatological visions, with concepts developed in modern/postmodern philosophy, psychology, sociology, and physical science, all from the perspective and in the conceptual framework of historic ontology, the philosophical study of the meaning of being. It's all quite clear to me now: Paul Tillich was the consummate 20th century Schoolman – a neo-scholastic, ontological, dialectical, existentialist, philosophical theologian. And since Part IV of his five-part *Systematic Theology* is about Life and the Spirit where he speaks much about people who are grasped by the Divine Spirit, Tillich was also an evangelical Christian and a Pentecostal Christian. Is

there some other kind of Christian? I refer to the root meanings of the words evangelical and Pentecostal, not to historical movements, denominations, or claimed or rejected labels. On the other hand, is it really possible for Tillich to be all of those people everywhere on the philosophical landscape at the same time? The answer is a crystal clear dialectical Yes-and-No. When a fourth speaker in that scene of the Broadway stage and Hollywood movie production of *Fiddler on the Roof* said “Hey, wait a minute, they can’t both be right, Tevye replied “You’re right.”

BOOK II

THE OPEN BIBLE LECTIONARY: A PLAN FOR ALL SEASONS¹²

**A TABLE OF SUNDAY GOSPEL READINGS IN SIXTEEN HALF-YEARS,
INCLUDING EVERY VERSE OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN,
FOLLOWING, IN THE MAIN, THE SPIRIT AND CONCEPT OF
THE THREE-YEAR LECTIONARIES**

**CONTAINS SUGGESTED LITURGICAL PRAYERS
KEYED TO THE PRINCIPAL (GOSPEL)
READINGS OF YEARS 1 TO 4**

**WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR SUMMER AND FALL COURSES
OF PRINCIPAL READINGS FROM THE EPISTLES
AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**CONTAINS SUGGESTED DIVISIONS FOR CONTINUOUS LITURGICAL
READING / SINGING THROUGH THE BOOK OF PSALMS,
AND LITURGICAL PROMPTS KEYED TO EACH
PSALM-OF-THE-DAY SELECTION**

BOOK TWO PREFACE

Lectionaries are usually developed by denominational or interdenominational committees or commissions made up of liturgical specialists and pastoral leaders appointed by councils to create a product that can be shared by many worshipping communities. And one of the great and widely touted values of lectionary based worship and preaching is that many congregations and parishes using the same or similar lectionaries will all be on the same page on any given Sunday of the year. Worshipers have a scriptural journey in common with friends and relatives in other churches. Scripture study and sermon preparation and response groups among preachers and people can be inter-parish or even interdenominational. Traveling worshipers who visit other congregations will have the same scriptural reference points as back home. With these generally recognized values of the family of three-year lectionaries derived from the Lectionary for Mass ordered by the Vatican II Council, three questions arise about this alternative sixteen half-year lectionary project: (1) Why would a preacher develop a different lectionary for their own use? (2) Why might anyone else be interested in such a lectionary? (3) What usefulness might such a lectionary have for the church at large?

[¶2] The answer to the first question is that for this preacher the values of a lectionary encompassing the whole Bible and that is designed with worshipful expository preaching in view outweighed the values of the three-year lectionaries that, while they are broadly shared across the Christian churches, are much too selective as to preaching pericopes and are intentionally designed toward a narrow view of what constitutes effective preaching fit for a Christian worship service. Perhaps more to the point of why I have persisted in this project for about fifty years is the same reason that the actor Michael Keaton gave for why his hound dogs hunt and why he succeeds repeatedly in “becoming” the character that he is to portray: “Because that is what it is

in them to do and that is what it is in me to do” (interview with TIME magazine December 20, 2016). On a more pious note, I have persisted in this project out of a sense of responsibility and thankfulness in that God has blessed me with the experience and vision, security and comfort, including congenital but undeserved and unjust social advantage, which have made it possible for me to do this work.

[¶3] The answer to the second question is that maybe there are some other preachers out there who have a high regard for serious *lectio continua de scriptura* expository preaching, a desire to preach on the many Old Testament and New Testament passages that are neglected or treated only as complementary readings with a principal reading by the three-year lectionaries, and maybe some of them would welcome a resource that would give them a liberating structure and liturgical aids to lead in worship and preaching based on a wider ranging series of Scripture texts.

[¶4] My answer to the third question is quite presumptuous, just like all of the above and this whole project. I sincerely hope that some of the liturgical specialists and pastoral and ecclesiastical leaders of the churches might get wind of this project and find it useful in re-igniting discussions of the shortcomings of the family of three-year lectionaries and perhaps even use this document as one study paper among many, or even as a trial lectionary, leading to a massive remodeling of one or more of the three-year lectionaries that are now in wide use across a number of denominations. I pray that this lectionary will have a very short useful life because it will surely be remaindered when the appropriate ecumenical and denominational commissions shall have got together and produced a worship and preaching lectionary that is truly Orthodox, truly Catholic, truly Reformed, truly Evangelical, truly Apostolic, and truly Pentecostal, a lectionary that truly comprehends the entire canon of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

BOOK II INTRODUCTION

(Works referenced here by author and date are listed with full publication data in the General Bibliography.)

a. Some Witnesses to the Values and Hazards of Lectionary-Based Worship and Preaching

The most extensive, thoughtful, and useful analyses of the three-year lectionaries from the Roman Catholic and Protestant perspectives respectively are Bonneau 1998 and West 1997, which should be read in the order mentioned here since Bonneau's writing is more positive and somewhat easier to follow. West 1997, 160-177, acknowledges the great courage that was required to produce *Lectionary for Mass* (1969) because of the many hard choices, sacrifices, and tradeoffs involved; and he identifies some of the ways that *The Revised Common Lectionary* (1993) represents a different set of choices, sacrifices, and tradeoffs and how the two lectionaries have exposed a greater than expected ecumenical solidarity of the church.

But before, during, and after the production of the tomes of Bonneau and West, the values of worship and preaching that are planned and conducted around a fixed table of Scripture readings (lectionary) have been expounded and extolled in many places. Some of those positive assessments have been accompanied by serious caveats and cautions. Bailey 1977 and James Sanders 1977 both begin their incisive critiques of the common text lectionary with excellent statements of the advantages of lectionary-based worship and preaching. Bonhoeffer 1975, 158-161, in his lectures on homiletics in the 1930's, discussed the pros and cons of preaching on the scheduled texts in the calendar-based lectionary and preaching continuously through books of the Bible, and selecting preaching texts situationally. Barth 1991, 94-95, in the lectures at his preaching seminars in the 1930's, also discusses the usefulness of both church prescribed readings and continuous series on books of the Bible as well as texts selected from the

preacher's deep and ever-growing personal conversation and familiarity with the Bible. But he cautions against the temptation of abusing a text for one's own purposes in addressing a theological subject, a church practice, or a situation in church, community, or world. Doan 1980, 102-105, describes the values of the lectionary and church year in helping the church to enter again and again into God's great story, while he also acknowledges some of the difficulties and limitations that the lectionary presents to preachers and congregations. Buttrick 1987, 232, 425, rejects rigid adherence to a prescribed lectionary while suggesting that the virtue of a lectionary is that it may guarantee a regular rehearsal of the event of Jesus Christ, God-with-us, and thereby contribute to the church's narrative self-understanding. Buttrick's 1994, 7, 18-19, 116-117, alarm about the collateral damage that has accompanied the recent explosion of lectionary based expository preaching also includes his clear acknowledgement of the essential values of Christian year lectionaries because they set the scriptures within the church's memory of Jesus Christ which was annually the basis and context of Christian preaching long before the scriptures were compiled and canonized, much less selectively organized into lectionaries.¹ Sloyan 1991, 118, touts the function of the lectionary readings as an effective element in the Roman Catholic approach to worship as "a celebration of God's word as delivered in the Bible," with liturgical prayers that "are either tissues of biblical phrasing or are inspired by the Bible;" and he writes that "The celebration of the Lord's Supper is an act of obedience to a biblical injunction."

Olsen 1985 welcomed the spur to thoughtful and studied planning and preparation of biblically based sermons presented by the three-year lectionaries including the facilitation of a whole canonical approach to interpreting the Gospel of Jesus Christ by having Old Testament and Epistle readings as "cross-references" to the principal Gospel lections. But he objected to the frequency of the repetition of the three-year cycle and the spotty coverage of the Epistles and the

Old Testament by way of texts selected as thematic cognates of the principal Gospel lections or by way of occasional semi-continuous liturgical reading courses from an Epistle or an Old Testament book. He also felt short-changed by the scant provision for the early church practice, expansively revived on the Calvinist/Zwinglian side of Protestant Reformation, of preaching through books of the Bible in continuous series. Consequently, he envisioned “A Reforming Lectionary” in a five-year cycle that would include a year in which the letters of Paul would provide the anchor or principal text of the day and a year in which the Gospel of John and letters of John would perform that function. Each Sunday in the five-year cycle would also have Old Testament readings in the form of semi-continuous courses rather than as thematic cognates of the principal reading from the New Testament. Olsen suggested, for purposes of discussion, a scheme that would match these Old Testament liturgical reading courses to the principal New Testament group of the year by way of some general literary and theological characteristics of the material but would not have the Old Testament lections specifically complement the principal reading from the New Testament Sunday by Sunday, so that these Old Testament courses could sometimes be used as principal texts for a preaching series rather than the New Testament course. Here is the schema that he offered:

(1) Mark	(2) Paul	(3) Luke
Genesis	Moses	History books
Creation	Exodus	Judges
Patriarchs	Deuteronomy	Ruth
		Samuel
		Kings
(4) Matthew	(5) John	
Prophets	Wisdom literature	
Isaiah	Proverbs	
Jeremiah	Ecclesiastes	
Ezekiel	Solomon	
Ezra/Nehemiah	Esther	
	Daniel	

Olsen invited any interested readers to join him in working out specific lections for this schema. He wrote “The challenge is to select the most significant lessons in each of these biblical materials—57 to 60 lessons for each year in a ‘semicontinuous’ series.” I can see in this framework enough very significant textual material, including much greater coverage of the four Gospels, for at least three five-year cycles. I do not know whether Olsen had any takers of his invitation or not.

Bower 1987, 15-30, gives a comprehensive review of the advantages of lectionary use while answering some of the commonly heard objections to lectionaries. Lowry 1992, 15-35, outlines important practical and theological assets of lectionary preaching after first detailing some of the liabilities. Langford 1993, 37, gives a brief summary of the benefits of widespread use of the 3-year lectionary among United Methodist churches: “it permits the systematic consideration of large parts of the Bible, assists in long-range planning for pastors, musicians, and lay worship leaders, and facilitates the publication of many other resources to foster enhanced worship and preaching.” Barbara Brown Taylor 1993, 73-74, highlights the value of submitting to the path laid out in the historic pattern of three readings and a Psalm as we join in the people’s service (*leitourgia*) that is the historic shape of worship. Long 2005, 72, 82, notes some of the values of the Christian Year lectionaries while acknowledging their omission of important texts and their tendency to skew the preacher’s interpretation toward the seasonal themes and liturgical traditions. Some of the practical values for preachers and people of lectionary-based worship and preaching are spelled out by Craddock 1985, 101-105, and by Robert McAfee Brown 1994 a, b. Ronald J. Allen 1998, 106-109, lists 13 “Potential Advantages” and 10 “Potential Disadvantages of Preaching from a Selected Lectionary.” Horace T. Allen 1996, 2-3, mentions positively that the lectionaries challenge preachers to bring deeper

and broader biblical and theological perspectives to their sermon preparation. Killinger 1996, 19-21, cites a phrase of George Buttrick, “full orbit of the faith,” in describing the major value of preaching from a lectionary, especially for beginning preachers, but also has a caveat about unrelenting adherence to the lectionary and the danger of slipping into a *nouveau* biblicism, echoing David Buttrick 1994b. Willimon 2001, 334, n. 4, cites “a strong testimonial to the value of lectionary-based preaching from a pastor in the free church (specifically, restorationist, or Churches of Christ) tradition” by Sensing 1995. Willimon prefaces his own positive assessment of the lectionary as a great gift with a list of lectionary limits. He notes, 334, that the historical purposes of lectionary development were not primarily homiletic but more liturgical, pastoral and pedagogical, that is, designed more for public reading courses than for public preaching. Many church leaders and teachers still reflect that perspective in their work. Some pastors have published the lectionary texts and festal themes in advance on a weekly or monthly basis and encouraged congregants to reflect on the lectionary texts in self-preparation for worship in upcoming Sunday services. I have yet to hear of anyone making use of this information on their individual initiative just because the information is published. But surely some adult study groups somewhere have taken a run at using the published lectionary lessons as a basis of group study and discussion in preparation for worship. Some pastors and worship teams have attempted with various levels of success and effectiveness to involve some congregants in sermon preparation and feedback groups. Such lectionary/sermon seminar groups should, ideally, be seen as an intentional effort to strengthen the character of preaching as a communal product of the whole congregation, which of course it will be to some extent wherever there is a pastoral preacher who lives and works and plays and serves and socializes among the congregants and the larger community. Moreover, the preaching transaction is always a collective/individual

production as each worshiper makes his or her own meaning out of what the preacher says and does at sermon time. I report my own experience with sermon seminar groups in Book I, Chapter V.

N. T. Wright 2005, 130-133, discusses the values of extensive liturgical reading courses in the classic offices of Morning and Evening Prayer in order to tell the entire story of Old and New Testaments, and he cautions against abridging these brief readings for the sake of incorporating more music. On the other hand, perhaps Willimon and Wright would join me and Phifer 1965, 141-142, in seriously questioning the practice of the liturgical reading without interpretive comment of passages that are obviously problematic in a modern context (also cited in n. 19 [¶ 2]). Skudlarek 1981, 13, cites from McArthur 1958, 27, a letter from a Blacksmith complaining to his ministers about the randomness of their scripture selections for Sunday services and preaching. And Skudlarek, 14-15, goes on to make the paradoxical case that a pastoral decision of how best to address the word of scripture to the congregation in their context on any given Sunday can be made most responsibly and creatively and engagingly on the basis of an ordered reading of the scriptures rather than an extemporaneous pastoral selection of a text. Sloyan 1984, 37-39, discusses the importance, purposes, and values of the lectionary structure of providing three readings for each Lord's Day, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel, and also some of the limitations, shortcomings, and distortions of that plan. The same writers that note the values of lectionaries in opening Christian worship and preaching up to a wider range of scripture selections also note the tendency of selective lectionaries to become a canon within the canon. I discuss that issue in Book I, Chapter I, "Canon and Communal Faith History: The Selection of Preaching Texts and the Use of Lectionaries." On the strictly negative side, Ritschl 1963, 149-150, observes that the Christian Year as an extended drama, can detract from the

congregation's awareness of the hour of worship as a unique time of Christ's presence with his people and that a fixed cycle of readings can lead to complacency due to over familiarity and predictability. But it need not be so. His program, 152, of having a committee or governing board of the congregation make a group decision as to the issues and texts to be addressed in the next few weeks of worship and preaching has little to commend it, either liturgically or homiletically, as I see it. John Stott 1982, 216-218, native to the Anglican lectionary tradition, reports having used such a scheme at times, but I do not recommend it. Representative democracy has its limits! On the other hand, Steimle 1980, 169-170, and Swank 1981, 57-62, discuss sermon seminars and sermon feed-back sessions in which groups from the congregation may participate in the study of texts for the development of sermons and in a dialogic response to sermons preached. These groups can be edifying and useful without the participants being directly involved in selecting texts and themes for planned preaching series.

b. Some References to Brief Histories of the Liturgical Calendar and Lectionary Development

Skudlarek 1981, 17-30, discusses the Jewish origins of the lectionary, the weekly rather than annual cycle of early Christian worship, and the emergence of the liturgical year around the third and fourth centuries. Old 1998b [vol. 2], 96, writes of the beginning of the Christian calendar and lectionary in the last quarter of the fourth century in a cycle of festal sermons including annual memorials to particular saints and martyrs and takes some notice of the further development and use of the liturgical calendar and lectionary in the remainder of his seven volume work. It appears from his study that the tension between adhering to a rational calendar of rehearsing the mighty acts of God around the Easter and Christmas cycles, with a good measure of continuous

scripture reading and exposition, and the tendency to crowd the calendar with the accumulation of saints' days and other minor feasts was present from the beginning and has persisted ever since. Old 1999 [vol. 3], 177, discusses how, in the development of the Gregorian lectionaries, the older tradition of Sunday Gospel lessons between Easter and Pentecost covering Jesus' upper room discourses in the Gospel of John, chapters 14-17, became confused or crippled by certain passages being pulled out to be used instead for the feast of St. Phillip and St. James, and how, unhappily, saints days were allowed to corrupt or abridge a *lectio continua de scriptura* Sunday sequence in this manner. Consider also the fourteen years, 1992 to 2006, required for the Episcopal Church of America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America each to settle on a way to fully embrace *The Revised Common Lectionary* and include it in their worship books for use in worship and preaching at their chief Sunday services, each incorporating in their worship books both of the two optional Old Testament tracks for the Sundays after Pentecost and each retaining their separate calendars of saints' days and minor feasts (I also reference this in n. 1).

A brief outline history of the development of the Christian liturgical year is given in Maxwell 1949, 170. Talley 1991 presents an extensive survey of the origins of the liturgical year organized around three elements: Paschal (the Easter cycle), The Day of His coming (the Christmas cycle), and the Process of Conversion (catechesis and Lent). Reumann 1977 gives a positive elucidation of the liturgical theology and history undergirding the development and use of Christian year lectionaries,² as do McArthur 1958, Jungman 1959 (especially pp. 210-291), Nocent 1977, Horace T. Allen 1991, Sloyan 2000,³ Bonneau 1998, and West 1997. Old 1998b [vol. 2], 410-416, discusses the pivotal development in Christian worship under the influence and preaching of Pope Leo the Great (400 - 461). Bower 1997, 27, defines the genius of the

Christological lectionaries: “The liturgical year that evolved over the centuries is in essence a retelling of the redemptive work (not the life) of Christ: he taught; he was crucified; he was raised up; he has given the Spirit.” G. Ernest Wright 1952, 28, has pointed out that the form of the festival cultus in ancient Israel, confessional, i.e., faith based, recital of the saving acts of God in history, is carried over into the worship practices seen in the early church of the New Testament. And, 68, he asserts that the Gospels themselves are not “mere memoirs or biographies. They represent a new literary form unknown in the pagan world: they are ‘gospels’, i.e., confessional recitals of historical events and traditions together with the inferences derived from the events and seen as an integral part of them” (also cited in Book I, Chapter III [¶ 11]). Thus, the christological structure of the lectionaries truly mimics the structure and flow of the Gospels: confessional recitals of God’s redemptive work in the birth, life, teaching/preaching, mighty works, death and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. Doan 1980, 102-103, cites Louis Bouyer 1956 in noting that “the church year and its story is precisely The Story of the mystery of the Word of God and the mighty saving acts of God.” *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God: Supplemental Liturgical Resource* 7 1992, 19-54, has a discussion of the meaning of liturgical time and the cycles of Easter, Ordinary Time, and Christmas. The significance of the liturgical year for the faithfulness of church preaching is indicated by a statement of Stewart 1946, 110-111, quoted by Stott 1982, 216: “The great landmarks of the Christian Year—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Whit Sunday, Trinity—set us our course, and...summon us back from the bypaths where we might be prone to linger, to the great highway of redemption.” West 1997, 36-37, describes the salutary effect of having texts that have become “classics” of the redemption story repeated in a fixed cycle that is short enough for people to become familiar with them. But he also notes, 84-85, citing Northrup Frye, that readings repeated regularly become iconic and

“frozen” or static to the effect that any movement or narrativity within the text (and in its immediate context) is obscured or ignored (also cited in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 23]). Of course, the classic texts did not become classics by way of recurring appearances as principal readings in lectionaries but rather by recurring usage for interpreting other texts and for interpreting life situations; and they can be maintained as classic texts in the same way despite the fact that they may appear less frequently in the newer lectionaries. The same thing is true for “the more essential parts of Scripture” a term associated with the Vatican II Council of 1963-65, according to Bonneau 1998, 36, which I have also mentioned in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 23]. Shepherd 1976a, 80, gives a brief summary of the maintenance of the Christian Year after the Reformation with some commonalities among Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican traditions. And he, 82, lists four notable changes in the Church Year that resulted from the implementation of the principles of reform enumerated in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council, completed in 1963: “The suppression of the three Pre-Lenten Sundays, the institution of a feast of the Baptism of Our Lord on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, the title of ‘Sunday of the Passion’ given to Palm Sunday, and the inclusion of the feast of Pentecost within the great fifty days of Easter.” The fact that the festal calendar can be internalized as a meaningful element in the piety—sense of God in one’s life—of a devout and thoughtful Christian is illustrated most movingly in Bonhoeffer 1972, 416, by the observation of Maria von Wedemeyer-Weller, Bonhoeffer’s fiancé, about her beloved’s life in prison, “He lived by church holidays and by seasons, rather than by the calendar months, and the dates on his letters were sometimes approximations at best. He voiced his disappointment that he had not received a letter from me or anyone else expressly for Whit Sunday.”

**c. Some Remaining Shortcomings of
*The Revised Common Lectionary***

The Revised Common Lectionary 1992 is the result of serious and successful work by The Consultation on Common Texts in addressing and correcting many of the problems and shortcomings of the 1983 edition, *Common Lectionary*, and *Lectionary for Mass* (1969), from which it is derived, problems that were identified by scholarly review and the responses of church pastors and worship committees. Fuller 1987 discusses the background of the assignment to provide Old Testament readings more representative of the Hebrew Bible. Daniels 1992b gives a brief review of the developments that led from the publication of the first edition, 1969, of the Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass* to the publication of the derivative Protestant *Revised Common Lectionary* (1992), along with prospects for future ecumenical developments. Langford 1993, 40, gives a list of seven categories of critiques and concerns about the 1983 *Common Lectionary* that had to be addressed in developing the revision: (1) Versification, (2) Certain passages excluded or included, (3) Women, (4) Calendar, (5) Old Testament selections for Sundays after Pentecost, (6) Psalm selections, (7) Anti-Semitism. He also, 41-42, details six major assumptions that guided the work of revising *Common Lectionary* (1983) to produce *The Revised Common Lectionary* (1992), and he summarizes the uneasy compromise of a two track approach to the Old Testament selections for the Sundays after Pentecost. Procter-Smith 1993, 52, makes it clear that the inclusion of more passages that recount the significant roles of particular women in the Bible does not come anywhere near to addressing all of the contemporary feminist issues with the nature of the Bible itself and with traditional views of the authority of the Scriptures, or with the distorting features that remain in the *Revised Common Lectionary*. But I do not find her proposed remedies convincing, particularly the suggestion of an

alternative or supplemental feminist-oriented lectionary. But, as mentioned in Book I, Chapter III [¶ 27 & ¶ 28], I am skeptical of issue-oriented alternative lectionaries generally. I am reminded of Elanor H. Porter's character Pollyanna who submitted a list of happy or glad texts to her doom and gloom pastor. That pastor should have taken Pollyanna's gesture as an innocent but bold reminder that every sermon on whatever text should be a publication of the glad tidings of God's love and care in the midst of all of life's comforts and afflictions, triumphs and tragedies (not a feel-good prosperity gospel). I remember the actor Karl Maudlin as The Rev. Paul, in the 1960 film *Pollyanna*, preaching a sermon with the deadly refrain "Death comes unexpectedly." I think that any perceived need to select preaching texts with feminist concerns in mind will surely be attenuated by the appearance of the *Wisdom Commentary* series which is promoted by its publisher, Liturgical Press, as providing the best of current feminist biblical scholarship, according to a review in *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* Fall 2021, p. 29, and by the publication of the *NRSVue* which edits the language of the *NRSV* in reference to females and differently abled persons, according to a review by Taussig 2022. My "A Classified Bibliography of Works about the Three-Year Lectionaries" can provide a guide to further study of perceived benefits and problems in *The Revised Common Lectionary* and its antecedents and some of the efforts to address expressed concerns of pastoral leaders and liturgical/homiletic theologians.

It is clear to me that some of the more penetrating and sweeping criticisms of *The Revised Common Lectionary* and its antecedents have not been seriously addressed, and significant remedies have not been proposed. There are six remaining drawbacks to *The Revised Common Lectionary* that have been especially bothersome to me:

1. *The Revised Common Lectionary* does not consistently follow its own concept. That is,

the year on Matthew does not stick with Matthew for the Gospel readings but resorts to traditional readings from other Gospels for certain feast days and seasons. The same is true for the years on Mark and Luke. And some Sundays have a reading from Acts in lieu of a reading from the Old Testament.⁴

2. *The Revised Common Lectionary* does not provide for a year on the Gospel of John but as Koester 1990, 21, noted “The Fourth Gospel appears sporadically throughout the lectionary, claiming a premier role on festival days, dominating the Easter Season, and making occasional guest appearances.” Koester, 24-25, observes that the supposed rationale for not planning for liturgical years structured around the Gospel of John, that it is a “spiritual, non-historical gospel,” a view dating from Clement of Alexandria, 2nd century, simply does not hold up in view of modern scholarship. According to Koester: “the synoptics, like John, are theological presentations of the story of Jesus, which were crafted to nurture Christian Faith.”⁵

3. *The Revised Common Lectionary* leaves many passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John unscheduled for Sunday reading and preaching. The passion narratives are scheduled for liturgical reading or dramatization but not for preaching. The neglected passages are part of the canon⁶ of authoritative scripture in virtually all churches of Christianity. Modern biblical scholarship is discovering new light every day in passages that are not scheduled in *The Revised Common Lectionary*. It is my opinion that there should be an intention to interpret as much of canonical scripture as possible in preaching over time and throughout the church universal while recognizing that no one preacher, worship leader, community, denomination, or generation can do it all, notwithstanding examples such as John Cotton (1584-1652) expounding almost the whole Bible to his Boston parish in 20 years of preaching four times a week, cited in Old 2004 (Vol. 5), 179. A basic assumption of the Reformed Tradition (Church-Reformed-Always-Being-

Reformed-By-The-Word-of-God), i.e., the Calvinist-Zwinglian-Presbyterian side of the Reformation, is that the entire canon is fit for worship and preaching.⁷ And, as to the Lutheran/Evangelical side of the Reformation, Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 114, report that Bonhoeffer affirmed: “basically every text is the text for a sermon, insofar as it is kept in its logical relationships and does not become meaningless, and insofar as the preacher is able to recognize it as the Word of God.” And James Sanders 1984, 38-39, observes in his chapter on canonical process that the authority of the Bible as a whole rests on the fact that every text that remains in the canon, including those that homiletic theologians refer to as hard passages, was kept in the Bible because a believing community found it useful and relevant to the living of the faith. I reference several hermeneutic/homiletic approaches to dealing with hard or seemingly hostile passages in n. 17 [¶s 1, 2, 3]. The chief Sunday service of Word and Sacrament is surely an all-important time to advance a comprehensive public reading and exposition of scripture, especially considering present day low rates of participation in Christian education programs, individual and group Bible study, and personal or family devotions.⁸

4. *The Revised Common Lectionary* strains to provide at least a taste of the ancient and proven practice of reading liturgically and preaching expositively through whole books of the Bible in course (*lectio continua de scriptura*) with its whole years on Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which it calls semi-continuous courses.⁹ Full continuity is prevented by arranging texts according to seasons and feast days, and because it would take much more than one year of Sundays to go through a whole Gospel. The resultant hopping and skipping through the Gospels works fairly well during the Christological part of the year, Advent to Pentecost, when the readings are organized around the seasonal themes based on the redemptive work of God through the life, death and resurrection of Christ and his gift of the Spirit. But the result is much less pleasing

during the Sundays after Pentecost. A whole year of preaching on one Gospel in this scattered fashion can wear almost as thin as, say, preaching straight through a Gospel in two years without regard to the Easter and Christmas cycles.

5. The Old Testament and Epistle readings of *The Revised Common Lectionary* sometimes follow a book course sequence, *lectio continua de scriptura*, for a few Sundays at a time, with some hopping and skipping, but are sometimes selected as thematic correlates or paired readings with the Gospel selections, with no Epistle or Old Testament book ever being treated in its entirety. The editors therefore refer to these as *semi*-continuous courses on the Epistles and Old Testament books; and Sloyan 1977, 135, tags it unceremoniously the “fragmented *lectio continua* principle” and “the snippet principle.”¹⁰ This does not lend itself to effective liturgical reading courses, much less to preaching an expository series with integrity on either the Old Testament readings or the Epistle readings such as can only be done by going through a book in course, *lectio continua de scriptura*.¹¹ An intention to provide for such reading and preaching is expressed in paragraphs 29-35 of the Introduction of *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, 14-15, following *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* 1981, articles 65-68, in Hoffman 1991, 140-141. *The Revised Common Lectionary* varies from *Lectionary for Mass* by providing longer passages of Old Testament and Epistle readings in view of two practices more common in Protestant churches than in Catholic churches: preaching from principal texts in the Old Testament or in the Epistles and services of word without sacrament. That variance from the Roman lectionary stems from a worthy intention that is only weakly fulfilled. The view of Christian worship and preaching expressed by Skudlarek 1981, 39, citing Fuller 1957, does not allow the legitimacy of reading and preaching *lectio continua de scriptura* through an Old Testament book with the Old Testament passages as the principal reading in the

chief Sunday services. Yet such Old Testament preaching is a time-honored tradition in Christian history and, as Boehringer 1990, 30, took note, has been a particular feature of preaching in the Black church tradition in America. Langford 1993, 46, points out that certain difficult Old Testament passages, e.g., the rape of Tamar, 2 Samuel 13, were excluded from *The Revised Common Lectionary* out of deference to the Roman Catholic tradition of not preaching on Old Testament passages (when the Roman church was still tentatively on board with the development of *The Revised Common Lectionary*) and a general sense that such a text should not be read in the Sunday worship service if it is not to be discussed in preaching or teaching. (also referenced in n. 19 [¶ 2]). The serious hermeneutic/homiletic problem of treating the Old Testament and the Epistles only as accessories to the principal lections from the Gospels and in occasional semi-continuous series of selections from an Epistle or Old Testament book is highlighted by the following comment in Johnson 1999, 457, with reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews, a comment which I think is applicable to all of the Epistles and all of the books of the Old Testament with the exception that in some cases the word argument should be replaced by the word narrative: "...Hebrews is a sustained argument from beginning to end. Only a complete reading enables one to appreciate its full force. The few self-contained pericopes it can provide for liturgical lectionaries lose a great deal by being excerpted." Of course, that hermeneutic/homiletic problem is also present in the organization of the Gospel lections thematically and fragmentarily around the christological calendar with only occasional semi-continuous series of Gospel lections, and I discuss that problem elsewhere in this work.

6. The suggested placement of the Psalm selections as a corporate sung response to the reading of the Old Testament lection is very pleasing and effective liturgically. However, the selection of the Psalms based on a thematic correspondence with the Old Testament reading has

limited the scheduled Psalms to 105 of the 150 canonical Psalms, as noted in *The Revised Common Lectionary*, 1992, 77-78. Additional problems arise if one departs from *The Revised Common Lectionary* to preach a *lectio continua de scriptura* series on a book of the Bible.

d. Features of *The Open Bible Lectionary*

The five obstacles listed above moved me in 1975 to begin developing an alternative table of readings, following the basic spirit and concept *The Revised Common Lectionary* which is derived from the *Lectionary for Mass*. The *distinctive* concepts and patterns of *The Open Bible Lectionary* were field-tested and refined by me during the final 22 years of my 37-year pastoral ministry; and further refined and enlarged on the basis of research, conversation and reflection during the first 28 years of my retirement from full-time pastoral ministry. Thus, to borrow language from the Hollywood ad agencies of the mid-20th century, this colossal, stupendous, extravaganza of a lectionary has been 50 years in the making! *The Open Bible Lectionary: A Plan for All Seasons*¹² has the following features:

1. Liturgical half-years on the Gospels run only from Advent to Pentecost, thus leaving the other half of the calendar year free for reading and preaching in course, *lectio continua de scriptura*, from Old Testament books and New Testament books other than the four Gospels, i.e., Acts, Epistles, and Revelation, as principal readings of the day. I usually work on an Epistle¹³ from the first available Sunday after Pentecost until the end of summer vacation—the church waiting for the final appearing of the Lord, as West 1997, 34-36, has it—and work on an Old Testament book from about mid-September until Advent—the church (Israel) in waiting for the advent of Messiah.¹⁴ These courses are resumed at the same season each year until the book is finished. Upon completion of an Epistle or an Old Testament book, the preacher or worship planning group should consider selecting a book from a different part of the Old Testament or

New Testament rather than simply taking up the next book in canonical order, just as the three-year lectionaries rotate among courses from various genre such as concise, aka minor, prophets, expansive, aka major, prophets, former prophets, latter prophets, wisdom writings, Pentateuch, Paul, other apostles, general, aka catholic, Epistles, Revelation, Acts. Horace T. Allen 1983b, 18, 21-22, reviews some of the formative discussions during the development of the Common Text Lectionary around the importance of both continuous readings of scripture such as in the historic daily office and selected festal readings, such as in the eucharistic Sunday lectionary.

2. Liturgical half-years on *all four* Gospels adhere strictly to the respective designated Gospel each year. It is admittedly a stretch to do three Christmas cycles using Mark's Gospel which does not have a nativity account. But that stretch can be very invigorating if one is willing to do some textual/thematic preaching (expounding on one verse, sentence, or phrase) during Advent/Christmas for a change of pace, and if one also remembers that while Christmas is indeed the celebration of the birth of Jesus, that nativity tradition functions as a sign and first instance of the incarnation of God in the whole life of Jesus. That larger incarnational connection opens the way to a wide range of appropriate texts for Advent and the Sundays after Christmas.¹⁵ The same principle is at work in selecting Christmas passages from the Gospel of John which, like Mark, lacks a nativity account.¹⁶

3. These half-years on the Gospels are organized broadly around the Christmas and Easter cycles with major sections of the Gospels taken in course where possible, somewhat like *The Roman* and *The Revised Common* lectionaries. The arrangement of the Gospel texts in *The Open Bible Lectionary: A Plan for All Seasons* does not adhere narrowly to the traditional themes and memorials of each liturgical season. But neither does it provide for reading and preaching through the Gospels in strictly canonical order, *lectio continua de scriptura*. Thus, I

acknowledge that *The Open Bible Lectionary: A Plan for All Seasons* is just as “semi” or fragmented as *The Revised Common Lectionary* and the *Lectionary for Mass* in the matter of treating the Gospels in continuous fashion. That is necessary in order to retain the main values of the traditional Christian liturgical year cycle. Statements of those values by others are referenced in the first paragraph of this Book II Introduction.

4. Every verse in all four Gospels is included in a passage designated for liturgical reading and preaching on some Sunday.¹⁷

5. A suggested first reading from the Old Testament for each Sunday,¹⁸ a thematic correlate or paired reading selected by the principle of harmony with the Gospel reading or, more generally, as a reading in harmony with the themes of the festal season.¹⁹ Preachers should substitute a different Old Testament companion reading when so moved by textual and theological study during sermon development.

6. Discussion of Gospel selections by seasons, giving some of the liturgical and homiletic rationale behind their selection and arrangement in the sixteen half-years.

7. A set of example liturgical prayers (opening prayer, confession of sin and brokenness, prayer of thanks) based on each Gospel reading for years one to four.

8. A guide and examples for writing dismissal charges that are based upon principal scripture readings and the particular emphasis chosen by the preacher of the day.

9. A Guide to selecting Epistle Lections as Second Readings.

10. Example liturgical prayers for a continuing summer series on Romans.

11. Example liturgical prayers for a continuing fall series on the Book of Genesis.

12. A guide to Psalm selection for Sunday services including traditions and resources for singing through all the psalms in continuous canonical order, with example liturgical texts (Call

to Worship, Call to Confession, Assurance of Pardon, Call for Offerings) based on a “Psalm of the Day,” i.e. each psalm, psalm portion, or combination of psalms, including all of each psalm in the Book of Psalms, taken continuously in canonical order. Historical and contemporary examples of Protestant and Roman Catholic communities that have traditions of liturgical singing of the Psalms in continuous canonical order are given in Chapter VI.

13. Extensive Notes citing scholarly writings and personal experience pertinent to the design of this lectionary, especially the observations and choices indicated in this Book II Introduction.

14. A Classified Bibliography of Works about the Three-Year Lectionaries.

15. A General Bibliography.

16. A comparative Index of Gospel readings in this lectionary and *The Revised Common Lectionary*.

PART I:

ADVENT TO PENTECOST

CHAPTER I

Gospel Lectionary in Sixteen Half-Years

INCLUDING EVERY VERSE OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN
WITH SUGGESTED COMPANION READINGS
FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

OVERVIEW

<u>Year</u>	<u>Gospel Portion</u>
1.	First Half-Year on Matthew
2.	First Half-Year on Mark
3.	First Half-Year on Luke
4.	First Half-Year on John
5.	Second Half-Year on Matthew
6.	Second Half-Year on Mark
7.	Second Half-Year on Luke
8.	Second Half-Year on John
9.	Third Half-Year on Matthew
10.	Third Half-Year on Mark
11.	Third Half-Year on Luke
12.	Third Half-Year on John
13.	Fourth Half-Year on Matthew
14.	Fourth Half-Year on Luke
15.	Fifth Half-Year on Matthew
16.	Fifth Half-Year on Luke

KEY TO NUMBERING SYSTEMS AND TITLES OF SUNDAYS

The titles of Sundays follow closely the numbering system in *The Revised Common Lectionary*. Sundays of seasons are identified with Arabic numerals. The numbers in parentheses () indicate the propers, i.e., appointed lections, for Sundays in Ordinary Time when Epiphany is observed as a season incorporating the five Sundays following the day of Epiphany, January 6. These numbers in parentheses () correspond to Proper 1, Proper 2, etc., as designated in the principal numbering system for the Propers of Ordinary Time in *The Revised Common Lectionary*. The numbers in square brackets [] indicate the Propers of Sundays in Ordinary Time according to the numbering system of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church of Canada (see *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, note, pp. 23-24). The chapter and verse designations in the Scripture passages listed here are those of the New Revised Standard Version.

YEAR ONE: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	24:36-44	The Necessity of Watchfulness	Isaiah 2:1-5
2	3:1-12	The Proclamation of John the Baptist	Isa. 11:1-3a, 6-10
3	11:2-11	Jesus Praises John the Baptist	Isaiah 35:1-6, 10
4	1:18-25	Birth of the Messiah	Isaiah 7:10-15

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	2:13-15, 19-23	Escape to Egypt and Return	Ecclesiastes 3:1-17
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	19:1-12	Marriage and Divorce	Genesis 28:6-9

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	3:13-17	The Baptism of Jesus	Isaiah 42:1-7
(Baptism of the Lord. Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	4:12-22	Jesus Begins Ministry, First Disciples	Isaiah 9:1-4
3	[3]	5:1-12	The Beatitudes	Zeph. 2:3, 3:11-13
4	[4]	5:13-16	Parables of Salt and Light	Isaiah 58:7-12
5	[5]	5:17-26	The Law & Prophets; Concerning Anger	Deut.30:11-20
6	(1)[6]	5:27-37	Concerning Adultery; Divorce; Oaths	Deut. 24:1-4
7	(2)[7]	5:38-48	Concerning Retaliation; Love for Enemies	Lev. 19:1-2, 17-18
8	(3)[8]	9:27-31; 20:29-34	Jesus Heals Two Blind Men	Isaiah 42:18-25
Last (4)[9]		17:1-9	The Transfiguration	Exodus 3:1-6

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR ONE: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	6:7-9	Hallowed Be Your Name	Ecclesiastes 5:1-3
2	6:10	Your Kingdom Come, Will be Done	Ezekiel 38:17-23
3	6:11	Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread	1 Kings 17:1-6
4	6:12	And Forgive Us Our Debts...	Exodus 34:1-9
5	6:13	And Do Not Bring Us ... But Rescue...	Job 1:6-12
Passion/Palm	6:14-15	For if You Forgive...	Leviticus 19:1-18

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	28:1-10	The Resurrection of Jesus	Exodus 15:1-11
2	18:1-4	True Greatness	Isaiah 3:1-9
3	18:5-9	Temptations to Sin	1 Kings 14:15-16
4	18:10-14	The Parable of the Lost Sheep	Ezekiel 34:11-16
5	18:15-17	Reproving Another Who Sins	Leviticus 19:17-18
6	18:21-22	Forgiveness	Micah 7:18-19
7	18:23-35	The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant	Amos 2:6-16
Pentecost	18:18-20	Christ's Presence in the Fellowship	Malachi 3:16-18

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Matthew as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR TWO: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON MARK

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MARK	Description	Old Testament
1	12:1-12	Parable of Wicked Tenants	Genesis 2:4b-15
2	9:9-13	The Coming of Elijah	Malachi 4:4-5
3	6:14-29	The Death of John the Baptist	Esther 5:1-8
4	12:35-37	The Question about David's Son	Isaiah 11:1-9

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	10:1-12	The Sanctity of Marriage	Genesis 2:18-25
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	10:13-16	Jesus Blesses Little Children	Exodus 2:1-10

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	6:6b-13	The Mission of the Twelve	Genesis 12:1-9
(Baptism of the Lord. Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	6:30-44	Feeding the Five Thousand	2 Kings 4:42-44
3	[3]	6:45-52	Jesus Walks on the Water	I Kings 19:9-18
4	[4]	6:53-56	Healing the Sick at Gennesaret	Numbers 11:10-17
5	[5]	7:1-23	The Tradition of the Elders	Isaiah 29:13-14
6	(1)[6]	7:24-30	The Syrophenician Woman	Isaiah 19:18-25
7	(2)[7]	7:31-37	Jesus Cures a Deaf Man	Isaiah 35:5-7
8	(3)[8]	12:13-17	The Question about Paying Taxes	Genesis 1:16-27
Last	(4)[9]	11:27-33	Jesus' Authority is Questioned	Jeremiah 26:12-15

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR TWO: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON MARK

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MARK	Description	Old Testament
1	14:1-2, 10-11	The Plot to Kill Jesus	Zechariah 11:4-14
2	14:3-9	The Anointing at Bethany	Deuteronomy 15:1-11
3	14:12-16	Preparation for The Passover	Deuteronomy 16:1-8
4	14:17-21	Jesus Predicts Betrayal	Obadiah 5-9
5	14:22-25	Institution of Lord's Supper	Jer.31:31-34 or Ex.24:1-8
Passion/Palm	11:12-26	Fig Tree; Temple; Fig Tree	Jeremiah 7:8-20

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	12:18-27	The Question about the Resurrection	Exodus 3:1-6
2	14:26-42	P's Denial Foretold; J. Prays in Gethsm.	Jonah 4:1-11
3	14:43-52	The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	Zechariah 13:2-9
4	14:53-65	Jesus before the Council	Daniel 7:13-14
5	14:(26-31, 53-54) 66-72	Peter Denies Jesus	Ezekiel 34:11-16
6	15:1-20	Jesus Before Pilate; Soldiers Mock Jesus	Isaiah 53:4-9
7	15:21-47	The Crucifixion, Death & Burial of Jesus	Proverbs 31:1-31
Pentecost	1:7-8	He Will Baptize with the Holy Spirit	Joel 2:28-32

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Mark as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR THREE: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	21:7-11	Signs of the End of the Age	2 Chronicles 15:1-7
2	21:12-24	The Coming Persecution	Zechariah 12:1-5
3	3:7-9	The Message of John the Baptist	Zephaniah 2:1-5
4	2:1-7	The Birth of Jesus	Micah 5:1-5a

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	8:19-21	The True Kindred of Jesus	2 Samuel 7:12-17
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	11:27-28	True Blessedness	Jeremiah 16:10-13

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	6:12-16	Jesus Chooses the Twelve Apostles	Exodus 24:9-18
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	8:1-3	Some Women Accompany Jesus	1 Kings 17:8-16
3	[3]	8:4-8	The Parable of the Sower	Jeremiah 32:6-15
4	[4]	8:9-15	Parable of the Sower Explained	Isaiah 61:1-4; 2 Esdras 8:41
5	[5]	8:16-18	A Lamp under a Jar	Isaiah 49:1-6
6	(1)[6]	8:22-25	Jesus Calms a Storm	Psalms 65:1-13
7	(2)[7]	8:26-39	The Gerasene Demoniac	Zechariah 3:1-10
8	(3)[8]	8:40-42a, 49-56	A Girl Restored to Life	1 Kings 17:17-24
Last (4)[9]		8:42b-48	A Woman Healed	Leviticus 15:25-30; Numbers 15:37-41

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR THREE: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	22:39-46	Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives	Daniel 10:10 – 11:1
2	22:47-53	Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	Micah 4:1-4
3	22:54-71	The Failure of Religion	Daniel 7:9-14
4	23:1-25	Pilate & Herod, Sentence of Death	Deuteronomy 19:15-21
5	23:26-43	The Crucifixion of Jesus	Jeremiah 11:14-17
Passion/Palm	23:44-56	The Death and Burial of Jesus	Deuteronomy 21:22-23

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	24:36-43	Jesus Appears to His Disciples	Judges 13:15-18
2	16:14-18	The Law and God's Kingdom	1 Samuel 16:6-13
3	17:1-10	Some Sayings of Jesus	Genesis 4:17-26
4	17:11-19	Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers	Leviticus 14:1-9
5	17:20-21	The Coming of the Kingdom	Exodus 12:40-42
6	18:1-8	Parable: Widow and Unjust Judge	Deuteronomy 10:12-22
7	18:9-14	Parable: Pharisee and Tax Collector	Genesis 13:8-13
Pentecost	12:2-12	Bravely Trust and Obey the Holy Spirit	Exodus 3:7-12

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Luke as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR FOUR: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON JOHN

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	JOHN	Description	Old Testament
1	5:19-30	The Authority of the Son	Isaiah 63:16 – 64:4
2	1:19-28	The Testimony of John the Baptist	Isaiah 40:3-5
3	1:1-2, 14	The Word Became Flesh	Isaiah 55:6-13
4	6:25-40	The Bread of Life	Exodus 16:1-36

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	1:5, 9-13	The True Light	Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-20
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	2:3-5	Jesus and His Mother	Genesis 41:53-57;
(Note: 2:1-12 is scheduled at Year 8, Epiphany 1)			2 Kings 3:13-20

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	1:15, 29-34	The Lamb of God	Isaiah 53:4-9
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	1:35-42	The First Disciples of Jesus	I Samuel 3:1-19
3	[3]	1:43-51	Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael	Genesis 28:10-17
4	[4]	5:1-18	Jesus Heals on the Sabbath	Genesis 2:1-3
5	[5]	5:31-40	Witnesses to Jesus	Deut. 17:2-7
6	(1)[6]	5:41-47, 7:15-24*	The Origin of the True Glory	Genesis 1:26-31
7	(2)[7]	8:12-20	The Self Validation of Jesus	Deut. 19:15-21
8	(3)[8]	8:21-30	Jesus Foretells His Death	Ezekiel 33:1-9
Last	(4)[9]	8:31-47	The Truth Will Make Free	Deut. 31:30 – 32:9

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

* This arrangement is drawn from Bultmann 1971, 268-278.²⁰

YEAR FOUR: FIRST HALF-YEAR ON JOHN

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	JOHN	Description	Old Testament
1	3:9-15	As Moses Lifted the Serpent	Numbers 21:4-9
2	3:16-21	God So Loved The World	Genesis 22:1-19
3	4:1-15	Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, 1	Exodus 17:1-7
4	4:16-30	Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, 2	Isaiah 6:1-8
5	4:31-42	Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, 3	Micah 6:9-16
Passion/Palm	12:20-36	Jesus Speaks about His Death	Ezekiel 37:24-28

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	20:1-10	The Resurrection of Jesus	Jonah 3:1 – 4:11
2	20:19-31	Jesus Appears to the Disciples	Genesis 15:1-6
3	10:1-10	Jesus the Gate of the Sheepfold	Ezekiel 34:1-10
4	17:1-5	Jesus Prays for Glorification	Deut. 33:1-29
5	17:6-19	Jesus Prays for His Disciples	Exodus 32:30-34
6	17:20-26	Jesus Prays for All the World, All Time	Isaiah 49:1-6
7	13:36 – 14:4	Discipleship	1 Chron. 17:1-15
Pentecost	14:15-17	Promise of Another Helper	Job 33:12-28

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on John as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR FIVE: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	24:29-33	The Coming of the Son of Man	Isaiah 18:1-7
2	24:34-36	The Time of His Coming	Isaiah 2:1-5
3	16:13-20	Peter's Declaration about Jesus	Jeremiah 31:31-34
4	22:1-14	The Parable of the Wedding Banquet	Isaiah 54:1-8

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	14:1-2	Herod Thinks Jesus is John Raised	Isaiah 9:2-7
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	14:3-12	The Death of John the Baptist	Judges 11:29-40

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	4:23-25	Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People	Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	13:16-17	Blessed are the Disciples' Eyes and Ears	Isaiah 48:1-8
3	[3]	14:13-21	The Feeding of the Five Thousand	2 Kings 4:42-44
4	[4]	14:22-33	Jesus Walks on the Water	Joshua 3:1-17
5	[5]	14:34-36	Jesus Heals the Sick at Gennesaret	Numbers 15:37-41
6	(1)[6]	15:1-20	The Tradition of the Elders	Leviticus 11:24-28
7	(2)[7]	15:21-28	The Canaanite Woman's Faith	Isaiah 49:5-6
8	(3)[8]	15:29-31	Jesus Cures Many People	Isaiah 35:1-10
Last	(4)[9]	15:32-39	The Feeding of the Four Thousand	Isaiah 25:6 – 26:6

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR FIVE: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	26:36-46	Jesus Prays in Gethsemane	Isaiah 51:17-23
2	26:47-56	Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	Zechariah 13:7-9
3	26:69-75	Peter's Denial of Jesus	Ezekiel 34:11-16
4	27:1-2, 11-14	Pilate Questions Jesus	Isa. 53:7-9, 52:14-15
5	27:15-26	Pilate Hands Jesus over to be Crucified	Deuteronomy 21:1-9
Passion/Palm	27:45-56	The Death of Jesus	Judges 5:4-5

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	27:62-66	The Guard at the Tomb	Daniel 6:16-18
2	9:18-26	A Girl Restored and a Woman Healed	1 Kings 17:17-24
3	21:12-17	Jesus Cleanses the Temple	2 Samuel 5:6-10
4	21:18-22	Jesus Curses the Fig Tree	Jeremiah 8:8-13
5	21:33-46	The Parable of the Wicked Tenants	Isaiah 5:1-7
6	22:15-22	The Question about Taxes	1 Samuel 8:1-22
7	23:37-39	The Lament over Jerusalem	Deut. 32:10-14
Pentecost	28:16-20	The Commissioning of the Disciples	Exodus 29:38-46

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Matthew as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR SIX: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON MARK

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MARK	Description	Old Testament
1	13:1-13	The Beginning of the Troubles Foretold	Micah 3:9-12
(Note: 13:9-13 used at Pentecost of this year)			
2	13:14-23	Culmination of the Troubles Foretold	Daniel 11:29-35
3	1:2-5	Prophetic Witness of John the Baptist	Malachi 2:17 – 3:5
4	1:1a	The Beginning of the Gospel	Isaiah 40:9-11
(First of three readings and sermons on Mark 1:1 introducing the Gospel of Mark)			

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	1:1b	The Gospel of Jesus Christ	Isaiah 52:7-12
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	1:1c	Jesus Christ, the Son of God	Nehemiah 8:13-18

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	1:9-11	The Baptism of Jesus	Isaiah 1:1-4
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	8:27-33	Peter's Declaration; 1 st Prediction/Passion	Isaiah 42:1-9
3	[3]	1:14-15	The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry	Isaiah 42:5-9
4	[4]	1:16-20	Jesus Calls the First Disciples	Jonah 3:1-10
5	[5]	1:21-28	J. Teaches & Exorcises with Authority	Deut. 18:15-22
6	(1)[6]	9:30-32	Jesus Again Foretells His Death & Res.	Exodus 30:11-13
7	(2)[7]	1:29-39	Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House	Job 7:10-7
8	(3)[8]	1:40-45	Jesus Cleanses a Leper	Lev. 13:1-2, 44-46
Last	(4)[9]	9:1-9	The Transfiguration	Exodus 3:1-12

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR SIX: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON MARK

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MARK	Description	Old Testament
1	1:12-13	The Temptation of Jesus	Genesis 9:8-15
2	10:32-34	A 3 rd Time Jesus Foretells His Death	Deut. 3:23-29
3	9:14-29	The Healing of a Boy with a Spirit	Exodus 32:1-10
4	9:33-37	Who is the Greatest?	Jeremiah 31:31-34
5	10:35-45	The Request of James and John	Genesis 13:1-18
Passion/Palm	11:1-11	Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem	Zechariah 9:9-12

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	16:1-8	The Resurrection of Jesus	Isaiah 25:6-9
2	4:1-9	The Parable of the Sower	Isaiah 55:1-13
3	4:10-12	The Purpose of the Parables	Isaiah 6:1-13
4	4:13-20	Interpretation of Parable of the Sower	Ezra 2:1 – 3:3
5	4:21-25	A Lamp under a Bushel Basket	Jeremiah 5:18-31
6	4:26-29	The Parable of the Growing Seed	Joel 3:9-16
7	4:30-34	The Mustard Seed; Use of Parables	Ezra 31:1-9
Pentecost	13:9-13	Not You...but the Holy Spirit	Exodus 4:10-17

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Mark as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR SEVEN: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	12:49-53	Jesus the Cause of Division	Micah 7:1-7
2	12:54-56	Interpreting the Time	Isaiah 49:8-12
3	20:1-8	The Authority of Jesus Questioned	Malachi 3:1-4
4	2:8-14	The Shepherds and The Angels	1 Samuel 16:1-7

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	2:15-20	The Visit of the Shepherds	1 Samuel 16:10-13
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	18:15-17	Jesus Blesses Little Children	2 Kings 4:8-37

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	14:25-35	The Cost of Discipleship	1 Kings 19:19-21
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	11:37-44	The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees	Micah 6:6-8
3	[3]	11:45-52	The Cruelty of the Lawyers	2 Chron. 24:17-22
4	[4]	11:53 – 12:1	The Treachery of the Pharisees	Deut. 4:9-14
5	[5]	12:22-34	Do Not Worry	1 Kings 10:1-10
6	(1)[6]	12:57-59	Settling with Your Opponent	Lev.19:17-18; Dt.19:15-21
7	(2)[7]	13:10-17	Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman	Deut. 5:12-15
8	(3)[8]	13:22-30	The Narrow Door	Deut. 30:11-20
Last	(4)[9]	13:31-35	The Lament over Jerusalem	Zechariah 10:6-10

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR SEVEN: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	11:2a	Hallowed be Your Name	Ezekiel 36:22-28
2	11:2b	Your Kingdom Come	Daniel 12:1-4
3	11:3	Give Us Each Day Our Daily Bread	Exod. 16:4-5, 13-15, 31
4	11:4a	Forgive Us Our Sins	Daniel 9:15-19
5	11:4b	Do Not Bring Us to the Time of Trial	Deut. 8:1-10
Passion/Palm	11:29-32	The Sign of Jonah	Jonah 3:1-5

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	19:1-10	Jesus and Zacchaeus	Ezekiel 34:11-16
2	19:11-27	The Parable of the Ten Pounds	Job 23:8-17
3	20:45-47	Jesus Denounces the Scribes	Isaiah 10:1-4
4	14:1-6	Jesus Heals the Man with Dropsy	Amos 8:4-6
5	14:7-14	Humility and Hospitality	Proverbs 25:1-7
6	18:18-30	The Rich Ruler	Deut. 30:11-20
7	18:35-43	Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar Near Jericho	Isaiah 35:3-7
Pentecost	10:21-22	Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit	Job 28:12-28

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Luke as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR EIGHT: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON JOHN

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	JOHN	Description	Old Testament
1	16:16-24	Sorrow Will Turn into Joy	Isaiah 26:1-6
2	1:6-8	The Witness of John the Baptist	Isaiah 40:1-11
3	1:3-4, 1:14	The Word and the World	Genesis 1:1-5
4	6:41-51	The Bread from Heaven	Isaiah 55:1-13

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	1:16-18	Grace from the Word in Flesh	Deut. 8:11-20
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	19:25-27	Jesus and His Mother	Genesis 11:1-8
(Note: 19:17-27 is scheduled below at Lent 5)			

BAPTISM OF THE LORD AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	2:1-12	The Wedding at Cana	2 Kings 4:1-17
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
(Note: John 2:3-5 is scheduled at Year 4, Christmas 2.)				
2	[2]	2:13-22	Jesus Cleanses the Temple	Jeremiah 7:1-15
3	[3]	4:43-54	Jesus Heals an Official's Son	Daniel 3:24-43
4	[4]	7:1-13	Jesus Goes to Jerusalem	Isaiah 40:27-31
5	[5] --	7:14, 25-29; 8:48-50, 54-55, 7:30*	The Hiddenness of the Revelation	Genesis 28:10-17
6	(1)[6]	7:37-44, 31-36*	The Contingency of the Revelation	Micah 5:2-4
7	(2)[7]	7:45-52	The Unbelief of Those in Authority	Exodus 23:1-3
8	(3)[8]	7:53 – 8:11	The Woman Caught in Adultery	Deuteronomy 22:22-24; 17:7
Last	(4)[9]	2:23 – 3:8	Nicodemus Visits Jesus	Ezekiel 11:14-21

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

* These arrangements and headings are drawn from Bultmann 1971, pp. 295-306.²⁰

YEAR EIGHT: SECOND HALF-YEAR ON JOHN

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	JOHN	Description	Old Testament
1	18:1-11	The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus	2 Samuel 15:13-23
2	18:12-27	Jesus before the High Priest	Zechariah 13:7-9
3	18:28 – 19:7	Jesus before Pilate, I	Leviticus 24:10-24
4	19:7-16	Jesus before Pilate, II	Isaiah 53:7-9
5	19:17-27	The Crucifixion of Jesus	Genesis 22:1-8
(Note: Verses 25-27 are scheduled above at Year 8, Christmas 2, “Jesus and His Mother”)			
Passion/Palm	19:28-42	The Death and Burial of Jesus	Ex.12:1-13, 21-27, 13:3-10

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	20:11-18	Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene	Genesis 15:1-6
2	21:1-14	Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples	Ezekiel 47:1-12
3	21:15-23	Jesus & Peter & the Beloved Disciple	Ezekiel 34:1-10
4	10:11-18	Good Shepherd and Hired Hand	Ezekiel 34:11-16
5	13:31-35	The New Commandment	Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:17-18
6	15:1-8	Jesus the True Vine	Ezekiel 17:1-8
7	15:9-17	Jesus the True Friend	Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18
Pentecost	14:25-26	The Promise of the Holy Spirit	Ezekiel 37:24-28

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on John as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR NINE: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	24:1-14	Beginning of the Troubles	Isaiah 24:1-23
2	24:15-28	Culmination of the Troubles	Daniel 11:29-35
3	17:9-13	Elijah has Come	Malachi 4:1-6
4	25:1-13	The Ten Bridesmaids	Isaiah 62:1-12

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	19:13-15	Jesus Blesses Little Children	Isaiah 11:1-10
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	2:16-18	The Massacre of the Infants	Jeremiah 31:10-20

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	9:32-34	Jesus Heals One Who Was Mute	Isaiah 35:1-10
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	9:35-38	The Harvest is Great, the Laborers Few	Numbers 27:12-23
3	[3]	10:1-16	The Mission of the Twelve	Zechariah 4:1-14
4	[4]	10:17-25	Coming Persecutions	Deut. 25:1-3
5	[5]	10:26-33	Encouragement to Fearless Confession	Exodus 3:7-12
6	(1)[6]	10:34-39	Not Peace, but a Sword	Micah 7:1-7
7	(2)[7]	10:40 – 11:1	Rewards	Numbers 11:24-30
8	(3)[8]	11:20-24	Woes to Unrepentant Cities	Genesis 19:12-14
Last (4)[9]		11:25-30	Jesus Thanks His Father	Isaiah 29:13-14; 40:10-11

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR NINE: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	12:1-8	Plucking Grain on a Sabbath	1 Samuel 21:1-6
2	12:9-14	The Man with a Withered Hand	Hosea 6:1-6
3	12:15-21	God's Chosen Servant	Isaiah 42:1-13
4	12:22-30	Jesus and Beelzebul	Isaiah 49:22-26
5	12:33-37	A Tree and Its Fruit	Deut. 30:11-20
Passion/Palm	12:38-42	The Sign of Jonah	Jonah 1:17; 2:10; 3:1-10

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	12:43-45	Return of the Unclean Spirit	Jeremiah 2:9-13
2	13:1-9, 18-23	The Parable of the Sower	Isaiah 55:1-13
3	13:10-15, 34-36a	The Purpose of the Parables	Isaiah 6:1-13
4	13:24-30, 36b-43, 47-50	Weeds, Explanation, Net	Leviticus 11:9-12
5	13:31-33	Parables: Mustard Seed; Yeast	Ezekiel 17:22-24
6	13:44-46	Parables: Hidden Treasure; Pearl	Job 28:1-28
7	13:51-53	Treasures New and Old	Isaiah 48:1-8
Pentecost	12:31-32	Blasphemy against the Spirit	Leviticus 24:10-23

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Matthew as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR TEN: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON MARK

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MARK	Description	Old Testament
1	13:24-31	The Coming of the Son of Man	Daniel 7:13-14
2	13:32-37	The Necessity of Watchfulness	Isaiah 64:1-4
3	1:6-8	John Announces One More Powerful	2 Kings 1:7-8, Malachi 4:5-6
4	2:18-22	The Presence of the Bridegroom	Isaiah 54:1-8

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	3:20-21, 31-35	The True Kindred of Jesus	2 Samuel 9:12-17
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	6:1-6a	The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth	Ezekiel 2:1-7

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	2:13-17	Jesus Calls Levi	Isaiah 61:1-4
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	2:23-28	Pronouncement about the Sabbath	Deut. 5:12-15, 23:24-25
3	[3]	3:1-6	The Man with the Withered Hand	I Kings 3:16-28
4	[4]	3:7-12	A Multitude at the Seaside	Joel 3:14-16
5	[5]	3:13-19	Jesus Appoints the Twelve	Isaiah 55:1-13
6	(1)[6]	3:22-30	Jesus and Beelzebul	Isaiah 49:22-26
(Note: 3:28-30 is used at Pentecost of this year.)				
7	(2)[7]	4:35-41	Jesus Stills a Storm	Genesis 8:1-5
8	(3)[8]	5:1-20	Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac	Zechariah 3:1-10
Last	(4)[9]	5:21-43	Jesus Restores a Girl, Heals a Woman	I Kings 5:1-19a

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR TEN: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON MARK

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MARK	Description	Old Testament
1	8:1-10	Feeding the Four Thousand	2 Kings 4:42-44
2	8:11-13	The Demand for a Sign	Deut. 13:1-5
3	8:14-21	The Yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod	Exodus 16:1-15
4	8:22-26	Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida	Deuteronomy 6:4-9
5	2:1-12	Jesus Heals a Paralytic	Isaiah 43:18-25
Passion/Palm	8:34 – 9:1	The Cost of Discipleship	Zechariah 9:9-17

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	16:9-20	The Longer Ending of Mark	Jeremiah 31:31-34
2	9:38-41	Another Exorcist	Numbers 11:24-30
3	9:42-50	Temptations to Sin	Leviticus 2:11-13
4	10:17-31	The Rich Man	Micah 6:1-8
5	10:46-52	The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus	Isaiah 35:3-7
6	12:38-40	Jesus Denounces the Scribes	Isaiah 5:8-23
7	12:41-44	The Widow's Offering	2 Kings 12:9-16
Pentecost	3:28-30	Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit	Numbers 24:1-14

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

1 (or 2)*	12:28-34	The First Commandment	Dt. 6:4-5, Lv.19:18
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Continue on Mark as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

* (Could be assigned to the second Sunday after Pentecost if it is desired to use a traditional Trinity Sunday text on the first Sunday after Pentecost.)

YEAR ELEVEN: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	17:22-27	The Last Days of the Son of Man	Genesis 6:5-8
2	17:28-37	The Suddenness of the Final Day	Genesis 19:24-26
3	20:41-44	The Question about David's Son	Jeremiah 23:5-6
4	11:33-36	The Light of the Body	Isaiah 9:1-7

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	3:19-20	Herod Imprisons John the Baptist	1 Kings 22:13-28
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	9:7-9	Herod's Perplexity	Job 28:20-28

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	9:1-6	The Mission of the Twelve	Deut. 8:11-20
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	9:10-17	Feeding the Five Thousand	Ex. 16:13-21,31-36
3	[3]	9:18-22	Peter's Declaration, Jesus Foretells Death	Daniel 7:13-14
4	[4]	9:23-27	The Conditions of Discipleship	Isaiah 1:10-17
5	[5]	9:37-43a	Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon	Exodus 32:1-14
6	(1)[6]	9:43b-45	Jesus Again Foretells His Death	Exodus 17:14-16
7	(2)[7]	9:46-48	True Greatness	Genesis 13:8-12
8	(3)[8]	9:49-50	Another Exorcist	Numbers 11:24-30
Last	(4)[9]	11:24-26	The Return of the Unclean Spirit	Isaiah 55:1-13

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR ELEVEN: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	18:31-34	A 3rd Time Jesus Foretells His Death	Hosea 6:1-3
2	22:1-6	The Plot to Kill Jesus	Exodus 12:1-13
3	22:7-13	Preparation of the Passover	Exodus 12:14-20
4	22:21-23	Jesus Predicts His Betrayal	1 Chron. 12:16-18
5	22:31-34	Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial	Job 1:6-12
Passion/Palm	19:28-40	Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem	Isaiah 59:14-20

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	20:27-40	The Question about the Resurrection	Exodus 3:1-6
2	6:46-49	The Two Foundations	Isaiah 28:14-22
3	20:9-19	The Parable of Wicked Tenants	Isaiah 8:11-15
4	20:20-26	The Question about Paying Taxes	Jeremiah 27:1-7
5	21:1-4	The Widow's Offering	2 Kings 12:9-16
6	22:24-30	The Dispute about Greatness	Isaiah 43:16-21
7	22:35-38	Purse, Bag, and Sword	Isaiah 53:10-12
Pentecost	24:50-53	The Ascension of Jesus	2 Kings 2:9-14

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Luke as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR TWELVE: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON JOHN

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	JOHN	Description	Old Testament
1	21:24-25	Signature of The Gospel of John	Isaiah 55:1-13
2	3:22-30	John Defers to Jesus	Isaiah 54:1-8
3	3:31-36	The One Who Comes from Heaven	Exodus 24:9-18
4	6:51b-59	The Bread from Heaven	Exodus 15:1-12

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	6:60-71	The Words of Eternal Life	Exodus 16:13-36
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	8:51-53,56-59 □	Jesus and Abraham	Genesis 17:15-22

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	6:1-15	Feeding the Five Thousand	2 Kings 4:42-44
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	9:1-12	A Man Born Blind Receives Sight	Isaiah 29:17-21
3	[3]	9:13-23	Pharisees Investigate the Healing	Deut. 13:1-5
4	[4]	9:24-41, 10:19-21 ○	Controversy Among the Jews	Is. 42:18-20; 43:8-13
5	[5]	10:22-39	Jesus is Rejected by the Jews	Isaiah 1:1-4
6	(1)[6]	10:40-42, 11:54 ◇	Jesus Turns from the Jews	1 Kings 19:1-10
7	(2)[7]	11:45-54	The Plot to Kill Jesus	Isaiah 56:1-8
8	(3)[8]	11:55-57	Will Jesus Come to Jerusalem?	Numbers 9:9-14
Last	(4)[9]	12:1-8	Mary Anoints Jesus	Deuteronomy 15:7-11

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

□ This arrangement is drawn from Bultmann 1971, 325-328.²⁰

○ This arrangement is drawn from Bultmann 1971, 335-342, 357-359.²⁰

◇ This arrangement is drawn from Bultmann 1971, 393-394, 409-412.²⁰

YEAR TWELVE: THIRD HALF-YEAR ON JOHN

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	JOHN	Description	Old Testament
1	12:37-43	The Unbelief of the People	Isaiah 52:13 – 53:3
2	8:12, 12:44-50*	Jesus the Light of the World	Isaiah 49:1-7
3	13:1-11	The Foot Washing & 1 st Interpretation	Isaiah 53:4-6
4	13:12-20	2 nd Interpretation of the Foot Washing	Isaiah 42:1-9
5	13:21-30	Jesus Foretells his Betrayal	Isaiah 43:8-13
Passion/Palm	12:9-19	Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem	Zephaniah 3:14-20

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	11:1-44	The Resurrection and the Life	Daniel 12:1-4
2	14:5-14	Jesus the Way to the Father	Deuteronomy 1:26-33
3	14:18-24	The Promise of the Holy Spirit	Leviticus 26:1-13
4	14:27-31	My Peace I Give to You	Isaiah 57:14-21
5	15:18-25	The World's Hatred	Psalms 69:4-12
6	15:26 – 16:4a	Disciples' Task and World's Hatred **	Isaiah 66:5-13
(Note: verses 15:26-27 are also used at Pentecost below)			
7	16:25-33	Peace for the Disciples	Zechariah 13:7-8
Pentecost	15:26-27, 16:4b-15	The Work of the Spirit	Isaiah 63:7-14

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

1 (or 2) ***	6:16-24	Jesus Walks on the Water	Exodus 14:21-31
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Continue on John as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

* For this arrangement see Bultmann 1971, 342-347.²⁰

** For this pericope and heading see Bultmann 1971, 551-557.²⁰

*** (Could be assigned to the second Sunday after Pentecost if it is desired to use a traditional Trinity Sunday text on the first Sunday after Pentecost.)

YEAR THIRTEEN: FOURTH HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	25:31-46	The Judgment of the Nations	Isaiah 51:1-6
2	11:12-19	A Violent and Fickle Generation	Zechariah 7:1-14
3	1:1-17	The Genealogy of Jesus	Isaiah 11:1-9
4	22:41-46	The Question about David's Son	Isaiah 9:1-7

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	12:46-50	The True Kindred of Jesus	1 Chronicles 17:1-15
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	13:54-58	The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth	Genesis 37:13-24

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	2:1-12	The Visit of the Wise Men	Isaiah 60:1-6
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	8:1-4	Jesus Cleanses a Leper	1 Kings 5:1-14
3	[3]	8:5-13	Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant	Isaiah 49:8-12
4	[4]	8:14-17	Jesus Heals Many at Peter's House	Isaiah 53:1-6
5	[5]	8:18-27	Would-Be Followers of Jesus	Genesis 8:1-5
6	(1)[6]	8:28-34	Jesus Heals the Gadarene Demoniacs	Zechariah 3:1-10
7	(2)[7]	9:1-8	Jesus Heals a Paralytic	Exodus 34:29-35
8	(3)[8]	9:9-13	The Call of Matthew	Hosea 5:15 – 6:6
Last	(4)[9]	9:14-17	The Question about Fasting	Ecclesiastes 31:1-9

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR THIRTEEN: FOURTH HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	26:1-16	Plot to Kill Jesus; Anointing	Jeremiah 32:1-15
2	26:17-35	The Passover with the Disciples	Zechariah 13:7-9
3	26:57-68	Jesus before the High Priest	Daniel 7:9-14
4	27:3-10	The Suicide of Judas	Zechariah 11:4-14
5	27:27-44	The Crucifixion of Jesus	Psalms 22:1-21
Passion/Palm	27:57-61	The Burial of Jesus	Gen. 49:28 – 50:14

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	28:11-15	The Report of the Guard	Ezekiel 13:1-16
2	6:19-23	Concerning Treasures; The Sound Eye	Deut. 8:11-20
3	7:1-6	Judging Others	Leviticus 19:1-16
4	7:7-12	Ask, Search, Knock; Golden Rule	1 Chron. 17:16-27
5	7:13-23	The Difficult Way of Discipleship	Deut. 30:11-20
6	7:24-27	Hearers and Doers	Genesis 6:9-22
7	7:28-29	As One Having Authority	Deut. 18:15-22
Pentecost	3:11-12	Baptism with Spirit and Fire	Malachi 3:1-4

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Matthew as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR FOURTEEN: FOURTH HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	21:25-36	The Coming of the Son of Man	Jeremiah 33:14-16
2	3:1-6	The Message of John the Baptist, Part 1	Isaiah 40:9-11
3	3:10-18	The Message of John the Baptist, Part 2	Zephaniah 3:14-18
4	1:39-56	Mary Visits Elizabeth	Micah 5:2-5a

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	2:21-24	Jesus is Circumcised, Named, Presented	Isaiah 52:7-12
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	2:36-40	The Prophet Anna	Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	3:15-17, 21-22	The Baptism of Jesus	Isaiah 42:1-4
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	3:23-38	The Ancestors of Jesus	Isaiah 11:1-10
3	[3]	4:14-21	Teaching Begins, Return to Nazareth	Nehemiah 8:1-10
4	[4]	4:22-30	Rejection at Nazareth	Jeremiah 1:4-10
5	[5]	5:1-11	Jesus Calls the First Disciples	Isaiah 6:1-8
6	(1)[6]	6:17-26	Blessings and Woes	Jeremiah 17:5-8
7	(2)[7]	6:27-36	Love for Enemies	Leviticus 19:17-18
8	(3)[8]	6:37-42	Judging Others	Leviticus 19:1-16
Last	(4)[9]	9:28-36	The Transfiguration	Genesis 15:1-21

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR FOURTEEN: FOURTH HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	21:37-38	Days in Jerusalem	Ezekiel 11:22-25
2	6:43-45	A Tree and Its Fruit	Deut. 30:11-20
3	13:1-9	Repent or Perish; The Barren Fig Tree	Exodus 3:1-12
4	15:11-32	Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother	Genesis 45:4-15
5	22:14-20	The Institution of the Lord's Supper	Isaiah 43:16-21
Passion/Palm	21:5-8, 20	Jesus Predicts Destruction	Jeremiah 7:1-15

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	24:1-12	The Resurrection of Jesus	Exodus 15:1-12
2	12:13-21	The Parable of the Rich Fool	Eccl. 1:2, 2:21-23
3	13:18-21	Parables: The Mustard Seed, The Yeast	Ezekiel 17:22-24
4	14:15-24	The Parable of the Great Dinner	Isaiah 25:6-9
5	15:1-10	Parables: Lost Sheep; Lost Coin	Ezekiel 34:11-16
6	16:1-13	The Parable of the Dishonest Manager	Genesis 30:25-43
7	16:19-31	The Rich Man and Lazarus	Amos 6:1, 4-7
Pentecost	24:44-49	Power from on High	2 Kings 2:1-14

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Luke as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR FIFTEEN: FIFTH HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	16:1-4	The Sign of Jonah	Deuteronomy 6:16-25
2	24:45-51	Faithful or Unfaithful Slave	Exodus 32:1-6
3	21:23-27	Jesus' Authority Questioned	Jeremiah 26:12-18
4	17:24-27	Jesus and the Temple Tax	Exodus 30:11-17

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	20:20-28	The Mother of James and John	1 Kings 1:15-21
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	21:28-32	The Parable of the Two Sons	Genesis 4:1-7

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	17:14-21	Jesus Cures a Boy with a Demon	Deuteronomy 32:1-5
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	16:21-23	Jesus Foretells Death & Resurrection	Isaiah 53:10-12
3	[3]	16:24-28	The Cross and Self-Denial	Deuteronomy 30:11-20
4	[4]	6:24-34	Serving Two Masters; Do Not Worry	Deut. 5:28-33
5	[5]	20:1-16	The Laborers in the Vineyard	Deuteronomy 24:14-15
6	(1)[6]	17:22-23	Jesus Again Foretells His Death	Isaiah 53:10-11
7	(2)[7]	25:14-30	The Parable of the Talents	Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18
8	(3)[8]	6:1-6	Concerning Almsgiving and Prayer	Leviticus 7:11-18
Last	(4)[9]	6:16-18	Concerning Fasting	Leviticus 16:29-34

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR FIFTEEN: FIFTH HALF-YEAR ON MATTHEW

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	MATTHEW	Description	Old Testament
1	4:1-11	The Temptation of Jesus	Gen. 2:7-9; 3:1-7
2	20:17-19	Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death	2 Chronicles 36:15-16
3	19:16-22	The Rich Young Man	Deut. 8:11-20
4	19:23-30	Riches and the Kingdom of Heaven	Job 42:1-2, 10-17
5	16:5-12	Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees	Exodus 17:1-7
Passion/Palm	21:1-11	The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem	Zechariah 9:9-17

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	22:23-33	The Question about The Resurrection	Isaiah 26:15-19
2	23:1-12	Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees	Deuteronomy 6:4-9
3	23:13-15	We Lose, You Lose	Amos 5:18-24
4	23:16-22	Woe to You Blind Guides, Fools	Deuteronomy 23:21-23
5	23:23-24	The Weightier Matters of the Law	Deuteronomy 14:22-29
6	23:25-28	Clean on the Outside, Dirty Inside	Numbers 19:14-20
7	23:29-36	Go Ahead, Kill My Messengers	2 Chronicles 24:20-22
Pentecost	22:34-40	The Greatest Commandment	Deut. 6:4-5, Lev.19:18

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Matthew as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

YEAR SIXTEEN: FIFTH HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF ADVENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	12:35-48	Alert and Obedient Slaves	Ezekiel 33:1-9
2	1:1-25	The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold	Judges 13:1-7
3	1:57-80	The Birth of John the Baptist	Malachi 3:1-4
4	1:26-38	The Birth of Jesus Foretold	Daniel 2:36-45

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

1	2:25-35	Simeon and His Song of Praise	Isaiah 52:7-12
(Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Christmas Day)			
2	2:41-52	The Boy Jesus in the Temple	Deuteronomy 16:1-8

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

AND

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (ORDINARY TIME)

1	[1]	4:31-37	The Man with an Unclean Spirit	Zechariah 3:1-10
(Baptism of the Lord: Epiphany Day if Jan. 6 is on Sunday, otherwise Sunday after Epiphany)				
2	[2]	4:38-44	Healings at Simon's House	Isaiah 35:1-10
3	[3]	5:12-16	Jesus Cleanses a Leper	Deuteronomy 24:8-22
4	[4]	5:17-26	Jesus Heals a Paralytic	Isaiah 60:1-7
5	[5]	5:27-32	Jesus Calls Levi	Isaiah 55:1-13
6	(1)[6]	5:33-39	The Question about Fasting	Zechariah 7:4-10
7	(2)[7]	6:1-5	The Question about the Sabbath	Leviticus 24:5-9
8	(3)[8]	6:6-11	The Man with a Withered Hand	Exodus 31:12-17
Last	(4)[9]	11:14-23	Jesus and Beelzebul	Isaiah 49:22-26

The reading listed for the Ninth Sunday should always be used on the Last Sunday before Lent.

YEAR SIXTEEN: FIFTH HALF-YEAR ON LUKE

SEASON OF LENT

Sunday	LUKE	Description	Old Testament
1	4:1-13	The Temptation of Jesus	Deut. 26:5-11
2	7:1-10	Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant	Isaiah 56:1-8
3	7:11-17	Jesus Raises the Widow's Son at Nain	1 Kings 17:8-24
4	7:18-35	Messengers from John the Baptist	Isaiah 35:1-10
5	7:36-50	A Sinful Woman Forgiven	Micah 7:18-20
Passion/Palm	19:41-48	Jesus Cleanses the Temple	Jeremiah 6:1-9

SEASON OF EASTER

Easter	24:13-35	The Walk to Emmaus	Hosea 6:1-6
2	9:51-62	Samaritans, Discipleship	1 Kings 19:19-21
3	10:1-20	The Mission of the Seventy	Numbers 11:10-30
4	10:23-24	Blessedness of Disciples	Isaiah 61:5-11
5	10:25-37	The Parable of the Good Samaritan	2 Chronicles 28:8-15
6	10:38-42	Jesus Visits Martha and Mary	Deuteronomy 8:1-20
7	11:1-8	Lord's Prayer, Perseverance in Prayer	Genesis 18:22-33
Pentecost	11:9-13	Holy Spirit Available for the Asking	1 Chronicles 17:16-27

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST (ORDINARY TIME)

Continue on Luke as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 after the Epiphany if they were not used due to a shortage of Sundays. Last after Epiphany should always be used the Sunday before Lent begins. The remaining Sundays after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER II

Discussion of Gospel Lectionary

a. Preliminary Remarks

[¶1] This section gives some of the liturgical and expository thinking behind the selection and arrangement of the Gospel readings in all sixteen of the half-years, and notes some of the agreements with and variances from the *RCL* (*The Revised Common Lectionary*). As with the *RCL*, some passages have been placed according to the traditional themes of the liturgical calendar and some have been placed in the canonical context of a continuous or semi-continuous series within one of the liturgical seasons. But there are other pericopes that are out of canonical continuity and also lack strong liturgical tradition or rationale for their calendar placement, other than being in, say, a collection or series of teachings, miracle stories, or conflict encounters. As in the three-year lectionaries, a sequence of texts sometimes proceeds by means of an interplay of concept and story, and, as West 1997, 83, observes, the progress of such a sequence is unlike a story line in that it is associative and cumulative rather than continuous.

[¶2] The Synoptic parallels have been distributed so that in most cases a lection from a Synoptic Gospel that has a parallel or two in the other Synoptic Gospels has been placed so that none of its parallel lections appears in the previous or succeeding liturgical year. This has been done while at the same time keeping all possible continuous and semi-continuous series intact. It is true that preachers and worshipers using the three-year lectionaries are accustomed to having parallel passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in successive years, especially on Sundays that are especial feast days with a strong thematic tradition based on a Gospel episode that is recorded in two or all three of the Synoptic accounts. That has not been problematic for worshipful reading and preaching

because preacher and people are attuned to the theme of the recurrent feast day and because the exposition in preaching is also shaped by the distinguishing features of how the episode is set in the respective Gospel. Most of those Synoptic parallels that lack such a traditional feast day connection are presented from only one of the Synoptic Gospels in the *RCL*. But this more comprehensive Gospel lectionary could become tedious if parallel passages often appeared in successive liturgical years with no strong feast day theme to justify the close similarity of lections from one year to the next. Therefore the arrangement was made to separate the parallels by at least one intervening liturgical year. A conscientious preacher would not preach the same sermon from a reading in Luke that she had preached from a parallel reading in Matthew or Mark. But reading the parallels in close succession from year to year would cause some worshipers to wonder why we are looking at the same episode that was surely read and proclaimed recently, and would prompt some preachers to devote too much time explaining that the same episode does something different for us when seen in the setting of another Gospel account. Thus the effort was made to put at least a full liturgical year between parallel accounts.

[¶3] For example, it could feel awkward to have a Lenten series on the individual petitions of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's setting one year and the next year have a Lenten series on the individual petitions of the Lord's Prayer in Luke's setting. An early draft of this lectionary had just that in years fifteen and sixteen. Now, they are in years one and seven. Expositions of the Lord's Prayer that have been presented in confirmation class resources and Sunday School or catechism class curricula have generally used a conflation of the two settings, such as the version customarily prayed in the corporate worship of the respective denomination. And some published series of sermons on the petitions of the Lord's Prayer have taken the same approach, or read publicly and preached from, say, the Matthew text and referred to the text in Luke when useful for proclaiming

the gospel. But reading and preaching on one or other of the two Gospel accounts in a liturgical half-year widely separated in time from reading and preaching from the other account provides an opportunity and a challenge to preach from each setting separately and differently, without resort to conflating or even much comparing of the two or citing of the one while preaching on the other. To this end, it is probably best to have the two settings separated by more than one year, and so they are. Old 2007, 133-134, reports on the case for preaching a separate sermon on each petition of the Lord's Prayer that Claus Harms (1778-1885) made in the introduction of the first sermon of his series, rather than just a sermon on the whole prayer as called for in the Lutheran lectionary of that time. Old notes that a series of sermons on the individual petitions was usually reserved for the youth confirmation services. Oh yes, and by the way, this lectionary also provides, in addition to the two series on the individual petitions of the Lord's prayer, a presentation of Luke's setting of the Lord's Prayer in whole along with the following verses in which Jesus gives a homely example to dramatize the efficacy of perseverance in prayer, Luke 11:1-8, on the seventh Sunday of Easter in Year Sixteen, followed on Pentecost Sunday by the other five verses of the passage on perseverance in prayer, Luke 11:9-13, indicating that the Holy Spirit is available for the asking. This is, of course, an opportunity and a challenge, to prepare a very different reading and preaching event on the Lord's Prayer from those on the Sundays of Lent in Years One and Seven when the Lord's Prayer is presented petition by petition.

[¶4] Another example where careful arrangement and distribution of parallels has seemed most important and been done very intentionally is Jesus' sequence of three predictions of his passion. Perhaps the best way to preach from the sequence of three announcements by Jesus of his coming ordeal in Jerusalem that are recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels would be while reading and preaching through each of those Gospels in a continuous course (*lectio continua de*

scriptura). Only in that way could one treat of each of the three predictions in proper perspective with respect to its position in the respective Gospel account and, implicitly, its geographic and temporal position in the progress of Jesus' ministry. In all three Synoptic Gospels, the first two predictions take place in the Galilean phase of Jesus' ministry (Throckmorton 1992), the first outside of the Galilee proper in the region of Caesarea Philippi about thirty miles north of the Sea of Galilee, on the occasion of Peter's declaration of Jesus' identity as the Christ; the second in the Galilee region proper as Jesus and the disciples are approaching Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. And, in all three Synoptic Gospels, the third prediction takes place during the journey to Jerusalem, possibly in the region of Samaria, as Jesus nears the arena of his final ordeal at Jerusalem in the region of Judaea. But, since treating of the three predictions in the context of such a canonically continuous course is not possible in the scheme of the liturgical year, I have arranged for them to be treated in a format that approximates the canonical setting and chronology in some respects. I have placed the three predictions of each Gospel in one of the half-years as follows: Mark in Year 6, Luke in Year 11 and Matthew in Year 15. This arrangement calls for all three predictions as recorded in a particular Gospel account to be treated in the same liturgical year so that the preacher must treat them as the interspersed series that they are in the Gospels and not in an arrangement where the three are scattered over separate liturgical years and, thus, isolated from each other. This arrangement has also been done in such a way as to have at least three intervening liturgical years before the three predictions are treated in another of the Gospels. Further, I have placed the first two predictions in each case in the early and middle weeks of the Season after Epiphany Day and the third prediction in the early weeks of the Season of Lent, thus to simulate in some way the canonical pattern which has the first two in the Galilean phase of Jesus' ministry and the third during the journey to Jerusalem (Throckmorton 1992). Homiletically, this arrangement of

the three predictions of the passion may assist the preacher in developing sermons that are structured and arranged to do for the hearers in the here and now something like what the texts were structured and arranged to do for the hearers or readers in the there and then, as some late twentieth century homiletics have defined the structural and performative intention of expository preaching, or, as P.T. Forsythe, cited by Donald Miller 1957, 131-132, has it, going further than the specific purpose of the text, but always along its own road.

[¶5] There are a few cases in which parallel passages do appear in successive years. For example, Year 9 has Matthew's account of the man with a withered hand at the Second Sunday of Lent and Jesus' words on Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, while Year 10 has Mark's accounts of the same at the Third Sunday after Epiphany and Pentecost Sunday. Avoiding those close encounters of parallel texts by relocation of whole years, or whole seasons, or individual passages would have created more undesired close encounters or would have further disrupted desired and helpful canonical continuity or closeness. The preacher who is a thoughtful exegete who keeps his or her theological thinking muscle in good working order by the daily discipline of theological reading will trigger insights and discover associations that turn such unwanted close encounters into preaching opportunities.

b. Discussion of Lectionary Selections and Arrangement by Seasons

1. Advent

This lectionary follows the themes of the three-year lectionaries as far as possible during Advent by beginning with apocalyptic or eschatological passages looking to the final advent of the Christ and continuing with the life and witness of John the Baptist in announcing the advent of the Christ in the public ministry of his cousin Jesus of Nazareth. Texts with other themes related to the time of the

incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus are also used in the readings for the Sundays of Advent and Christmas in the course of the sixteen half-years. Koester's 1990, 22-25, perspectives on "Text and Historical Context," "Text and Seasonal Context," and "Lectionary, History, and Theology" are instructive in this regard.

Advent, Year One: First Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 24:36-44, The Necessity of Watchfulness
- (2) 3:1-12, The Proclamation of John the Baptist
- (3) 11:2-13, Jesus Praises John the Baptist
- (4) 1:18-25, Birth of the Messiah

The readings for the four Sundays are the same as for Year A in the *RCL* (*The Revised Common Lectionary*). The structure of the Gospel selections for the Sundays of Advent in all three years of the *RCL* 1992, 14, is stated as follows: "The gospels of the first Sunday in each year are all apocalyptic; those of the second and third Sundays refer to the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent the annunciation of the birth of Christ is proclaimed." This structure is followed in some years of *The Open Bible Lectionary*, but other patterns have necessarily been devised and employed for the Sundays of Advent in some of the 16 years and those schemes will be discussed as they appear below.

Advent, Year Two: First Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 12:1-12, The Parable of the Wicked Tenants
- (2) 9:9-13, The Coming of Elijah

(3) 6:14-29, The Death of John the Baptist

(4) 12:35-37, The Question about David's Son

The reading for the first Sunday, a parable told against the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (11:27, 12:12), is a parable of the advent of God's reign signaled in the public ministry of Jesus and expected in full at the final consummation.

The reading for the second Sunday contains an allusion by Jesus to the ministry of John the Baptist which announced the advent of Messiah in the public ministry of Jesus.

The reading for the third Sunday may remind some of us, by the injustice of the death of John the Baptist in the midst of the public ministry of Jesus, that to be free for a truly joyous Christmas, many of us may need preparation that clears situational ground with regard to some of the persistent, pervasive, and haunting injustices in our world and in our lives. The preacher may be helped by the commentators here. Raymond E. Brown 1975, 1976, 1977, 1-9, discusses the theological foundation of "Putting An Adult Christ Back into Christmas."

The reading for the fourth Sunday contains a bit of sophisticated argument that points to the pre-existence of Messiah, eternal Word made flesh in Jesus (compare John 1:1-18), son of David and also master of David. Christmas is celebrated not only as feast of the nativity but also as feast of the incarnation in a larger sense than the event of Jesus' birth, God revealed in the works and words of Jesus in his life as an adult as in "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself," 2 Corinthians 5:19 *NRSV*. Again, Raymond E. Brown's *An Adult Christ at Christmas* may be helpful to preachers here and at other Advent seasons in this lectionary. The text Mark 12:35-37 is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

Advent, Year Three: First Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 21:7-11, Signs of the End of the Age
- (2) 21:12-24, The Coming Persecution
- (3) 3:7-9, The Message of John the Baptist
- (4) 2:1-7, The Birth of Jesus

The readings for the first and second Sundays are a connected pair, part of the synoptic apocalypse according to Luke, a vision of the crisis at the second advent of the Christ. These verses are not assigned to any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The reading for the third Sunday is a portion of the reading (3:7-18) assigned to Advent 3 in Year C of the *RCL*.

The reading for the fourth Sunday is a portion of the reading (2:1-20) assigned to Christmas Day in Years A, B, and C of the *RCL*.

Advent, Year Four: First Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 5:19-30, The Authority of the Son
- (2) 1:19-28, The Testimony of John the Baptist
- (3) 1:1-2, 14, The Word Became Flesh²⁰
- (4) 6:25-40, The Bread of Life

The reading for the first Sunday is one of the many passages in John that strongly assert the unity of God the Father and God the Son and, thus, affirm that Jesus is God incarnate. But, especially important for Advent Sunday, the second paragraph of the section points to the final advent, a time

of judgment when the Son will be revealed to all, including those who have died. This passage is not scheduled at all in the *RCL*.

The reading for the second Sunday is the same as the one scheduled in the *RCL* for the third Sunday of Advent in Year B, the year on Mark!

The reading for the third Sunday is selected verses from what is sometimes called the Prologue of John's Gospel (1:1-18, so Sloyan 1988, 13). This lectionary schedules other clips from the first five verses of John's Prologue for the first Sunday of Christmas in Year Four and for the third Sunday of Advent in Year Eight. See the lectionary table in Chapter I for those years and Sundays or the Index of Gospel Readings in the back of the book for how these verses are distributed and coupled with other verses of the Prologue for purposes of Sunday reading and proclamation. The verse divisions and pairings here are based in part on the arrangement in Bultmann 1971.²⁰ The *RCL* schedules 1:1-14 as Christmas, Proper III, years A, B, and C to be used on Christmas Day or sometime during the Christmas cycle. The *RCL* schedules 1:1-18 for the second Sunday after Christmas in years A, B, and C.

The reading for the fourth Sunday is about "the bread that came down at Christmas" (refrain and theme of an original poem in a handmade Christmas greeting received from my pastor/poet/visual artist friend Omar Rust in Advent 1963). The lengthy discourse on the bread from heaven in John 6:25-59 is divided into three parts (25-40, 41-51, 51b-59) that are scheduled respectively for the fourth Sunday of Advent in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth years of this lectionary. The *RCL* assigns portions of this discourse (Chapter 6 of John) to Sundays of July and August in Year B and to Thanksgiving Day in Year C. I have quoted in n. 8 Sloyan's 1988, 75, comment on the ill-considered relegation of most of John 6 to the summer calendar in the three-year lectionaries.

Advent, Year Five: Second Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 24:29-33, The Coming of the Son of Man
- (2) 24:34-36, The Time of His Coming
- (3) 16:13-20, Peter's Declaration about Jesus
- (4) 22:1-14, The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

The readings for the first and second Sundays are a connected pair, a portion of the synoptic apocalypse according to Matthew, Jesus' promise of his second advent. These verses are not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The reading for the third Sunday is a departure from the conventional Advent reading of the witness of John the Baptist to Jesus as the expected Messiah, but certainly no more anachronistic in relation to the birth of Jesus than John's witness which heralded the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, not his birth, except for that joyous leap by John while both were still in their mothers' wombs (Luke 1:44). Peter's declaration is proclaimed as a statement of whose birth it is that we are to celebrate at Christmas, that is, the birth of "the Messiah, the Son of the living God." We anticipate our celebration of the birth of Jesus with childlike excitement and family-style conviviality; but who do we say that the son of man is? There is surely a sermon lurking in that question.

The reading for the fourth Sunday, The Parable of the Wedding Banquet, is read as a proclamation that the incarnation of God in the birth of Jesus signals the fulfillment of the prophecies and promises of God's marriage with God's people, and also proclaims the crisis of judgment that is an essential ingredient of our encounter with God in the coming of Christ and anticipates the crisis of his final appearing at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. We

celebrate the birth of Jesus as a moment of eschatological fulfillment in the history of salvation.

Advent, Year Six: Second Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 13:1-13, The Beginning of the Troubles Foretold (Note: verses 9-13 are also used at Pentecost of this year.)
- (2) 13:14-23, The Culmination of the Troubles Foretold
- (3) 1:2-5, The Prophetic Witness of John the Baptist
- (4) 1:1a, The Beginning of the Gospel (first of three readings and sermons on Mark 1:1 introducing the Gospel of Mark)

The readings for the four Sundays differ from those in the *RCL* Year B in order to adhere strictly to the gospel of Mark and to encompass more of Mark's apocalyptic sections in the Advent seasons of the three Markan years of this lectionary.

The reading for the first Sunday includes a reading (13:1-8) that the *RCL* schedules for the middle of November, Ordinary Time, in Year B. Verses 9-13 are not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The reading for the second Sunday is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*. The *RCL* reading for the second Sunday in Year B, Mark 1:1-8, has been divided and distributed as noted in the next paragraph here.

The reading for the third Sunday is a portion of the reading for the second Sunday in the *RCL* Year B, Mark 1:1-8. Here, Mark 1:1 is reserved for use on the fourth Sunday of Advent and on Sundays one and two of Christmas. Mark 1:6-8 is reserved for a fuller treatment of John the Baptist on the third Sunday of Advent in Year Ten, the Third Half-Year on Mark.

The reading for the fourth Sunday begins a series of three Sundays on Mark 1:1. The

opening words of the Gospel according to Mark are so pregnant with meaning-filled words and phrases that this lectionary proposes a series of three sermons be preached on the fourth Sunday of Advent and the two Sundays of Christmas on Mark 1:1 to introduce the remainder of this half-year on Mark: The Beginning of the Gospel (Advent 4), The Gospel of Jesus Christ (Christmas 1), Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Christmas 2).¹⁵ A study of several strong commentaries on Mark, especially their general introductions to the gospel of Mark, works on the themes of the liturgical calendar such as Nocent 1977, and a working knowledge of Christian theology, especially Christology, and of the issues and needs of church and world of today will provide the preacher with plenty of material for the three sermons. Johnson 1999, 166-167, provides a useful introduction to the particular richness of this one verse and the way that Mark uses it for “The Sudden Beginning” of his Gospel. I describe in Book I, Chapter III [¶1], and in other places that I reference there, how Johnson 1999, 160, credits Mark 1:1 with enlarging the meaning of the word gospel to include a new literary genre – narrative accounts of the life and work of the Savior. A helpful perspective on the early Christian experience of resurrection faith as the impulse for the writing of the Gospels is presented in Buttrick 1992, especially Chapter 3 “Resurrection and God’s New Order.” The key for Advent-Christmas preaching and hearing is that the importance and message of the incarnation in the birth, life, and death of Jesus and in “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God” (Mark 1:1) can only be fully appreciated when seen from the perspective of faith in the risen Lord. This 3-week series for Sundays Advent 4 and Christmas 1 and 2 is presented as a rare exception to the generally accepted homiletic caution nowadays against preaching on a one verse or one phrase or one word text. On the other hand, the preacher who is strongly committed to scripture exposition and diligent in exegetical work can make this series of three sermons on Mark 1:1 a matter of “tight exposition” as described by Old 2007 (Vol. 7), 653, rather than simply using a word in a text to extract a theme

or theological teaching for sermon development. I have a further discussion and references on cautions as well as current and historic practice in preaching on short texts at n. 15.

Advent, Year Seven: Second Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 12:49-53, Jesus the Cause of Division
- (2) 12:54-56, Interpreting the Time
- (3) 20:1-8, The Authority of Jesus Questioned
- (4) 2:8-14, The Shepherds and the Angels

The readings for the first and second Sundays are tandem sayings of Jesus from Luke's Special Section (Throckmorton 1992) that indicate the crisis or eschatological nature of his incarnate advent and may also point to a future advent.

In the reading for the third Sunday, Jesus' response to the challenge by the chief priests and the elders of the people about the authority of his public ministry challenges *them* with regard to the authority of John's baptism. The parallel passage in Matthew is listed for the corresponding Sunday in Year Fifteen.

The reading for the fourth Sunday is a portion of the reading (2:1-20) scheduled for Christmas Day in Years A, B, and C of the *RCL*.

Advent, Year Eight: Second Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 16:16-24, Sorrow Will Turn into Joy
- (2) 1:6-8, The Witness of John the Baptist
- (3) 1:3-4, 14, The Word and the World²⁰

(4) 6:41-51, The Bread from Heaven

The reading for the first Sunday has Jesus assuring the disciples near the fateful end of his life that they will see him again in a joyful second advent, which coheres with the tradition of beginning the Advent season with passages from the synoptic apocalypses.

The reading for the second Sunday is the same as Year B, Advent 3 in the *RCL*.

The reading for the third Sunday is a portion of the readings that the *RCL* has for Christmas Day of Years A, B, and C (1:1-14) and for the second Sunday of Christmas of Years A, B, and C (1:1-18). I have commented above at the third Sunday of Advent in Year Four regarding the distribution and linkages of the verses in the first five verses of John's prologue (1:1-18) in this lectionary.

The reading for the fourth Sunday invites the image of Jesus as the bread that came down at Christmas. I commented above at the fourth Sunday of Advent in Year Four regarding attribution for the phrase "bread came down at Christmas" and regarding the division and distribution of the entire discourse on the bread from heaven, John 6:25-59.

Advent, Year Nine: Third Half-Year on MATTHEW

(1) 24:1-14, Beginning of the Troubles

(2) 24:15-28, Culmination of the Troubles

(3) 17:9-13, Elijah has Come

(4) 25:1-13, The Ten Bridesmaids

The readings for the first two Sundays are a connected pair on signs of the end of the age and, thus,

of the second advent of the Christ, including predictions of the destruction of the Temple, the coming persecutions, and the desolating sacrilege.

The reading for the third Sunday contains an allusion by Jesus to the ministry of John the Baptist in preparation for the advent of Messiah.

The reading for the fourth Sunday is about the necessity of preparedness for the advent of Messiah, the celebration of the marriage of God and humankind in the incarnation, and anticipation of and preparedness for the marriage supper of the lamb in heaven after the final advent; selected to facilitate the celebration of the birth of Jesus and the incarnation of the Christ in the life of Jesus as an eschatological event.

Advent, Year Ten: Third Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 13:24-31, The Coming of the Son of Man
- (2) 13:32-37, The Necessity of Watchfulness
- (3) 1:6-8, John Announces One Who is More Powerful than He
- (4) 2:18-22, The Presence of the Bridegroom

The readings for the first two Sundays are a continuous pair and focus on the eschatological second advent of the Christ.

The reading for the third Sunday presents John the Baptist as a prophet who announces the coming of one who is more powerful and more worthy than he.

The reading for the fourth Sunday proclaims the appropriateness of feasting, not fasting, during the time of God's incarnation in Jesus, the presence of the bridegroom.

Advent, Year Eleven: Third Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 17:22-27, The Last Days of the Son of Man
- (2) 17:28-37, The Suddenness of the Final Day
- (3) 20:41-44, The Question about David's Son
- (4) 11:33-36, The Light of the Body

The readings for the first and second Sundays are a connected pair on the coming completion of the kingdom of the Christ, that is, the second advent.

The reading for the third Sunday might illuminate references to “son of David – Son of God” in our advent hymns just as the references in the hymns might help to illuminate the Scripture text.

The reading for the fourth Sunday could point to a relationship between the eye that is The Light of the Body (when it is not darkness) and the Light that was coming into the world in the birth of Jesus, John 1:9, on which see Christmas 1 in Year Four, First Half-Year on John.

Advent, Year Twelve: Third Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 21:24-25, Signature of the Gospel Writer
- (2) 3:22-30, John Defers to Jesus
- (3) 3:31-36, The One Who Comes from Heaven
- (4) 6:51b-59, The Bread from Heaven.

The reading for the first Sunday is the last two verses of this Gospel, which can make a fitting introduction to this liturgical half-year of readings and preaching from the fourth gospel. The

disciple acknowledges that his account is only suggestive of all that Jesus did. Just so, our proclamation of a promised second advent (third if one counts the resurrection as the second) acknowledges that all that Jesus did points to the much more that the Christ will do in the final consummation. These verses are not assigned to any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The readings for the second and third Sundays are a connected pair about John the Baptist in relationship to Jesus. These verses are not assigned to any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The reading for the fourth Sunday presents Jesus as the Christmas gift of bread from God. I commented above at the fourth Sunday of Advent in Year Four regarding attribution for the phrase “bread came down at Christmas” and regarding the division and distribution of the entire discourse on the bread from heaven in John 6:25-59. The present reading is in continuity with the one that follows on the first Sunday of Christmas: 6:60-71, “The Words of Eternal Life.”

Advent, Year Thirteen: Fourth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 25:31-46, The Judgment of the Nations
- (2) 11:12-19, A Violent and Fickle Generation
- (3) 1:1-17, The Genealogy of Jesus
- (4) 22:41-46, The Question about David’s Son

The reading for the first Sunday follows the convention of the three-year lectionaries of devoting the early Sundays of Advent to eschatology, the anticipation of a second advent of the Christ. It is the lection that the *RCL* schedules for New Year’s Day of Years A, B, and C.

The reading for the second Sunday refers to the asceticism of John the Baptist. A portion, 11:16-19, is scheduled in the *RCL* for the Sunday between July 3 and July 9 in Year A.

The reading for the third Sunday, The Genealogy of Jesus, serves in Matthew's gospel as a preface to Matthew's birth account in 1:18-25 (scheduled for Year 1, Advent 4). Matthew's genealogy account is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The reading for the fourth Sunday is selected here for celebrating the birth of Messiah: son of David, yet Son of God! It is a portion of the passage, 22:34-46, that the *RCL* schedules for the Sunday between October 23 and 29 in Year A.

Advent, Year Fourteen: Fourth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 21:25-36, The Coming of the Son of Man
- (2) 3:1-6, The Message of John the Baptist, Part 1
- (3) 3:10-18, The Message of John the Baptist, Part 2
- (4) 1:39-56, Mary Visits Elizabeth

The readings for the first two Sundays are the same as in Year C of the *RCL*.

The reading for the third Sunday is a portion of the reading in the *RCL*. 3:7-9 was passed over here because it was used on the third Sunday of Advent in Year Three, the first half-year on Luke.

The reading for the fourth Sunday includes all the options given in the *RCL* Year C plus Verse 56.

Advent, Year Fifteen: Fifth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 16:1-4, The Sign of Jonah
- (2) 24:45-51, Faithful or Unfaithful Slave

(3) 21:23-27, Jesus' Authority Questioned

(4) 17:24-27, Jesus and the Temple Tax

Of the three reports of Jesus' reference to "the sign of Jonah," (Matthew 12:38-42, 16:1-4, Luke 11:29-32) only the one scheduled for the first Sunday here includes Sadducees in the questioners. The presence of the party that rejects belief in a resurrection or an afterlife expands the focus from the public ministry of Jesus and the death and resurrection of the Son of Man to a general resurrection at the consummation of all things at the *final advent* of the Christ.

The reading for the second Sunday is another selection, as in Advent seasons of other years, from the synoptic apocalypse, images of a second advent of the son of man.

The reading for the third Sunday has Jesus responding to the challenge by the chief priests and the elders of the people about the authority of his public ministry by challenging them with regard to the authority of John's baptism. The placement here follows the Advent tradition of lifting up John as the forerunner of Jesus.

In the reading for the fourth Sunday, Jesus' discussion of the temple tax with his disciples indicates that he, as the Son of God, the Lord incarnate who has come into *his Temple* (Malachi 3:1), is free to claim exemption from the temple tax, yet he is also free to pay the tax in order to avoid giving offense, much as he "did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself ...being born in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6-7). So, Christians are free to claim exemption from all the extravagant expressions of a cultural-secular-commercial Christmas, but also free to embrace some of them as signs of God's extravagant grace and condescension in the incarnation, and to avoid giving unnecessary offense that could be counterproductive to Christian witness.

Advent, Year Sixteen: Fifth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 12:35-48, Alert and Obedient Slaves
- (2) 1:1-25, The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold
- (3) 1:57-80, The Birth of John the Baptist
- (4) 1:26-38, The Birth of Jesus Foretold.

The reading for the first Sunday has Jesus exhorting his followers to be always ready for his ultimate advent “at an unexpected hour.”

The readings for the second, third, and fourth Sundays are selected portions of Chapter 1 on the predicted births of John the Baptist and Jesus and on the event of John’s birth. The order of the passages has been rearranged so that the Advent series ends with the prediction of Jesus’ birth rather than the account of John’s birth.

2. Christmas

In the years when the nativity accounts in Luke and Matthew are not principal readings on the last Sundays of Advent or the Sundays of Christmas, sections of the nativity accounts might be adapted for some sort of introductory rite for Sunday service just as the liturgy of the palms, sometimes with processional, is used when the principal reading for Passion/Palm Sunday is from the passion rather than the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Also, in many churches, some in the Sunday morning congregation will have shared in a recital of the nativity stories at Christmas pageants and Christmas Eve services. A thoughtful preacher may refer to these shared experiences on Sunday morning in a way that brings on board those who may have missed the earlier services. Christmas is not only a

celebration of the birth of Jesus but also, in a larger sense, a celebration of the incarnation of God in the whole life and saving work of Jesus as the Christ. As I mentioned in the discussion of Advent, Year Two, *An Adult Christ at Christmas* by Raymond E. Brown, 1975, 1976, 1977, can be helpful along with the commentaries when the focus of Advent and Christmas is on the larger scope of the incarnation rather than just on the nativity accounts. In some years, one or sometimes both of the Sundays of Christmas have a lection selected for the theme of family as in “The Holy Family of Christ,” one of the intentions of the Sundays after Christmas in the *Lectionary for Mass*, according to Nocent 1977, I, 243-246.

Christmas, Year One: First Half-Year on MATTHEW

(1) 2:13-15, 19-23, Escape to Egypt and Return

(2) 19:1-12, Marriage and Divorce

The reading for the first Sunday of Christmas (Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise the first Sunday after Christmas) is a portion of the reading (2:14-23) for Year A, first Sunday after Christmas Day in the *RCL*.

The reading for the second Sunday of Christmas is selected for the theme of family as in “The Holy Family of Christ,” one of the intentions for the Sundays after Christmas in the *Lectionary for Mass*, according to Nocent 1977, I, 243-246. Proclaiming the ideal in the traditions around the family of Mary and Joseph is not sufficient to address the marital problems that can lead to divorce. But what role or function *can* this ideal perform in contemporary marriage and family life? Let the preacher be tenderhearted and careful of the known or likely experience of some in the congregation. The larger theological perspective of the reconciliation with God of a humanity that

has become alienated from God and each other in sin may also be considered.

Christmas, Year Two: First Half-Year on MARK

(1) 10:1-12, The Sanctity of Marriage

(2) 10:13-16, Jesus Blesses Little Children

The first Sunday is Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise it is the first Sunday after Christmas Day.

The readings for the two Sundays of Christmas are a connected pair, selected on the basis of the theme of the Christian values related to children and family. I commented above in the introduction to **Christmas** and at Christmas, Year One, second Sunday, on the designation of family life as a Christmas theme.

Christmas, Year Three: First Half-Year on LUKE

(1) 8:19-21, The True Kindred of Jesus

(2) 11:27-28, True Blessedness

The reading for the first Sunday (Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise the first Sunday after Christmas Day) is selected for the theme of Christian family and holy family of Jesus.

The reading for the second Sunday is selected for the connection with Mary and the birth and infancy of Jesus: “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!”

Christmas, Year Four: First Half-Year on JOHN

(1) 1:5, 9-13, The True Light (that was coming into the world)²⁰

(2) 2:3-5, Jesus and His Mother

The reading for the first Sunday (Christmas Day if December 25 is on Sunday, otherwise the first Sunday after Christmas Day) is a portion of the reading (1:[1-9], 10-18) assigned to the second Sunday after Christmas Day in Years A, B, and C of the *RCL*. A possible homiletic connection of John 1:9 to Luke 11:33-36, the light of the body, is suggested in my comments at Advent 4 in Year Eleven, Third Half-Year on Luke.

The reading for the second Sunday, a curious interaction between Jesus and his mother at the wedding feast in Cana, was selected for the theme of family as in “The Holy Family of Christ,” one of the intentions for the Sundays after Christmas in the *Lectionary for Mass*, according to Nocent 1977, I, 243-246. The larger passage, 2:1-12 is scheduled at Year 8, Epiphany 1 of this lectionary.

Christmas, Year Five: Second Half-Year on MATTHEW

(1) 14:1-2, Herod Thinks Jesus is John Raised from Death

(2) 14:3-12, The Death of John the Baptist

The reading for the first Sunday tells of the danger posed to both Jesus and John the Baptist by the politically fearful King Herod Antipas. This is a reemergence thematically, after thirty years, of the danger and threat to Jesus’ life and ministry initiated by the fears of Herod the Great at the time of Jesus’ birth: 2:13-15, 19-23 Escape to Egypt and Return (Year 1, Christmas 1) and 2:16-18 The Massacre of the Infants (Year 9, Christmas 2).

The reading for the second Sunday makes a continuous pair with the reading for the first

Sunday and is a flashback by the narrator to explain the basis of Herod's fear of Jesus as possibly John the Baptist raised from the dead. Here is another encounter with the danger of being announced as a new king and the risk to one who announces the new king, a danger that became manifest through the Herod family dynasty during both the infancy and the adult ministry of Jesus. The pair of passages for these two Sundays reminds us that Christmas is not only the feast of the nativity of Jesus but also the feast of the incarnation in a larger sense than just the birth event: the revelation of God's presence the whole life and ministry of Jesus. Again, Raymond E. Brown's 1977, *An Adult Christ at Christmas* can be of help to the preacher.

Christmas, Year Six: Second Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 1:1b, The Gospel of Jesus Christ
- (2) 1:1c, Jesus Christ, the Son of God

The readings for the two Sundays complete a series of three readings of 1:1, which I discussed above under Season of Advent, Year Six, fourth Sunday.

Christmas, Year Seven: Second Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 2:15-20, The Visit of the Shepherds
- (2) 18:15-17, Jesus Blesses Little Children

The reading for the first Sunday is continuous with the reading for the fourth Sunday of Advent, 2:8-14 The Shepherds and the Angels.

The reading for the second Sunday is selected for the theme of childhood and family and a

possible theological connection between Jesus' kingdom call to childlike trust and acceptance and the church's celebration of the infancy of Jesus. As I mentioned above in my discussion at Christmas 2 of Year One, "The Holy Family of Christ" is a theme intended for the Sundays of Christmas in *Lectionary for Mass* according to Nocent 1977, I, 243-246.

Christmas, Year Eight: Second Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 1:16-18, Grace from the Word in Flesh
- (2) 19:25-27, Jesus Provides for his Mother from the Cross

The reading for the first Sunday continues the theme, from the third Sunday of Advent, Year Eight (John 1:3-4, 14), of incarnation as the revelation of God through his beloved Son, the eternal Word and Light, being born in human likeness in Jesus as the Christ. See my comments there and on the third Sunday of Advent in Year Four (1:1-2, 14). These are portions of the reading (1:1-18) scheduled for the second Sunday after Christmas in Years A, B, and C of the *RCL*.

The reading for the second Sunday is selected for the theme of family per my reference to Nocent 1977 above at Christmas of Year 1. These verses are also included in the longer reading of 19:17-27 scheduled below at the fifth Sunday of Lent below. This is a portion of the passion narrative (18:1 – 19:27) scheduled for Good Friday of Years ABC of the *RCL*.

Christmas, Year Nine: Third Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 19:13-15, Jesus Blesses Little Children
- (2) 2:16-18, The Massacre of the Infants

The reading for the first Sunday is selected for the theme of family in accordance with my reference to Nocent 1977 above at Christmas of Year 1. This passage is not included for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The reading for the second Sunday of Christmas, a dangerous threat to Jesus in his infancy, is a portion of the reading, 2:13-23, scheduled for the first Sunday after Christmas in Year A of the *RCL*.

Christmas, Year Ten: Third Half-Year on MARK

(1) 3:20-21, 31-35, The True Kindred of Jesus

(2) 6:1-6a, The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

The reading for the first Sunday is in keeping with the Christmas theme of family, especially holy family of Jesus, as mentioned in earlier years above. The portion of the passage concerning Jesus and Beelzebul, 3:22-30, is reserved for use in a semi-continuous series during the Season after Epiphany of this year.

The reading for the second Sunday relates to the previous Sunday as a continuation of the theme of resistance and rejection within the context of home and family.

Christmas, Year Eleven: Third Half-Year on LUKE

(1) 3:19-20, Herod Imprisons John the Baptist

(2) 9:7-9, Herod's Perplexity

The reading for the first Sunday may be used to present the arrest and imprisonment of John the

Baptist as a harbinger of what Jesus must pass through in the consummation of his mission, a reminder that the power of the incarnation in the birth and life of Jesus is only made effectual for salvation in the atonement through his death and resurrection (and the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit). Christmas is about Messiah and it's for adults as well as children. Notice that in Luke the report of John's arrest follows immediately upon John's witness to the one coming after him – even before Luke's report of Jesus' having been baptized (by John, we infer) – whereas in Matthew and Mark the report of John's imprisonment comes much later and rather indirectly as a narrative flashback, at the time of the mission of the twelve apostles and Herod's great alarm over the public stir caused by the ministry of Jesus and his disciples.

Second Sunday: While in the reading for the first Sunday Luke reports the imprisonment of John much earlier in the narrative sequence than Matthew and Mark, here he joins the other two Synoptic Gospels in reporting the *execution* of John indirectly at the time of Herod's great alarm over the public buzz about the activities of Jesus and the apostles. But Luke reports John's execution through a recollection by Herod rather than using Mark's and Matthew's device of an aside by the Gospel narrator. Here is another turn of the screw as the Gospels anticipate the fateful resolution of the mission of Messiah. Compare the much earlier anticipation and threat by the father of Herod Antipas, Herod the Great, in Matthew 2:13-23. See my discussion above at Year One, Christmas 1: Verses 13-15, 10-23, Escape to Egypt and Return and at Year Nine, Christmas 2: Verses 16-18, Massacre of the Infants.

Christmas, Year Twelve: Third Half-Year on JOHN

(1) 6:60-71, The Words of Eternal Life

(2) 8:51-53, 56-59, Jesus and Abraham²⁰

The reading for the first Sunday follows on from the discourse on the bread from heaven and makes a connected pair with the reading for the fourth Sunday of Advent, 6:51b-59.

The reading for the second Sunday, Jesus and Abraham, may be interpreted in light of 1:1-18, the pre-existent Word made flesh. This arrangement of verses is suggested by Bultmann 1971, 325-328.²⁰

Christmas, Year Thirteen: Fourth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 12:46-50, The True Kindred of Jesus
- (2) 13:54-58, The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

The reading for the first Sunday was selected for the theme of family per my reference to Nocent 1977 above at Christmas of Year 1. This is a passage that the *RCL* does not schedule for any Sunday.

The reading for the second Sunday, The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth, can be seen as combining the theme of hometown and family with that of the early and continuing danger, threat, and resistance in Jesus' life and mission, as in the family's escape to Egypt and return and relocation from Bethlehem of Judea to Nazareth of Galilee when Jesus was an infant, which is recorded in Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 and scheduled for the first Sunday of Christmas in Year One of this lectionary and for the first Sunday after Christmas Day in Year A of the *RCL*. The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth, 13:54-58, is not scheduled by the *RCL* for any Sunday.

Christmas, Year Fourteen: Fourth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 2:21-24, Jesus is Circumcised, Named, Presented in the Temple
- (2) 2:36-40, The Prophet Anna

The readings for the two Sundays are portions of a longer passage, 2:22-40, that the *RCL* schedules for the first Sunday after Christmas Day in Year B, which is nominally the year on Mark.

Christmas, Year Fifteen: Fifth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 20:20-28, The Mother of James and John
- (2) 21:28-32, The Parable of the Two Sons

The readings for the two Sundays are selected for the theme of family per my reference to Nocent 1977 above at Christmas of Year 1. Of course, as with most texts in any calendar based lectionary, an exegesis of the passage will lead the preacher to meanings and connections and directions other than the calendar rationale for selecting the text, often providing a different, perhaps more perceptive, perspective on the meaning of the day in the liturgical calendar. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Christmas, Year Sixteen: Fifth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 2:25-35, Simeon and His Song of Praise
- (2) 2:41-52, The Boy Jesus in the Temple

The reading for the first Sunday is a portion of the reading that the *RCL* has for the first Sunday after Christmas in Year B, which is nominally the year on Mark.

The reading for the second Sunday is the same as the reading that the *RCL* has for the first Sunday after Christmas in Year C, which is nominally the year on Luke.

3. Baptism of the Lord and Season after Epiphany Day (Ordinary Time)

This lectionary follows the *RCL* in observing the first Sunday after the Epiphany as the Feast of Baptism of the Lord, except that when January 6, Epiphany Day, is on a Sunday, this lectionary has the Feast of Baptism of the Lord coincide with Epiphany Day rather than the following Sunday. Such overlapping of festivals and Sabbaths was anathema to the Qumran Essene community, according to E. P. Sanders 2005, 262, but surely no 21st century liturgiologist would be fussy enough to strenuously object on principle to this convenient collision. And while the *RCL* has the respective synoptic account of the baptism of Jesus on this Sunday in each of its three years, this lectionary has the report of the baptism of Jesus on the first Sunday after the Epiphany from each of the four gospels in only four of its sixteen half-years: Matthew 3:13-17 in Year One, First Half-Year on Matthew; Mark 1:9-11 in year Six, Second Half-Year on Mark; Luke 3:21-22 in Year Fourteen, Fourth Half-Year on Luke; and John 1:15, 29-34 in Year Four - First Half-Year on John.

In other years, the readings for the first Sunday after the Epiphany are either selected on the basis of traditional texts for the Epiphany and the first one or two Sundays following the Epiphany, such as the Visit of the Wise Men and the Wedding at Cana, or they are selected to begin a continuous or semi-continuous series on the teachings and works of Jesus for the season after Epiphany (Ordinary Time). In those years when the reading for the first Sunday after Epiphany is not a report of the baptism of Jesus, some churches may wish to incorporate the theme of baptism or the baptism of Jesus with liturgical texts and actions that are appropriate for their particular

denominational or local tradition such as introductory readings and rites, baptisms of new members of the family, and renewal of baptism for all the baptized people assembled. The *RCL* schedules Matthew 2:1-12, The Visit of the Wise Men, for January 6 of all three years, A, B, and C. Many churches do not assemble for worship on the day of Epiphany, January 6, unless it is on Sunday but use some of the traditional Epiphany texts such as Matthew 2:1-12 The Visit of the Wise Men and John 2:1-12 The Wedding at Cana on the first or second Sunday following January 6. The *RCL* has John 2:1-11 The Wedding at Cana on the second Sunday after Epiphany (January 6) in Year C, the year “on Luke.”

This lectionary does not follow the *RCL* in naming this section of ordinary time Season of Epiphany (Ordinary Time) but names it Baptism of the Lord and Season *after* Epiphany (Ordinary Time). *Liturgical Year* 1992, 23 & 49, has indicated that part of the meaning of Ordinary Time is that the weekly feast of Sunday, the day of resurrection, is honored during this time as the principal feast of the Christian calendar; and Bonneau 1998, 95, mentions in another context: “the fundamental festal character of *Sunday* – the day of the Lord, the day of commemorating the resurrection, the first day of the new creation.” It seems to me that Season *after* Epiphany gives a stronger nod to Ordinary Time than does Season *of* Epiphany. It also agrees with the naming of the other section of Ordinary Time in the *RCL*, that is, Season *after* Pentecost (Ordinary Time). Some of the text selections in *The Open Bible Lectionary* for the Season after Epiphany give recognition to the focus on Sunday as the principal feast by being continuous or semi-continuous series of readings in the Gospel of the year.

With regard to the Synoptic Gospels: series of passages from the Galilean Section of Jesus’ ministry (Throckmorton 1992) have been mainly preferred for this season with the Judean Section being mainly preferred for the season of Lent. This distribution or progression has not been

maintained completely since (a) the number of Sundays available and the number of passages available do not allow for complete consistency in the distribution by seasons and since (b) in some years there are series of passages from either the Galilean Section or the Judean Section or Luke's Special Section (Throckmorton 1992) or the Gospel of John that are used during the Season of Easter, a season which can be observed as a time when disciples recall and reflect on the teachings and works of Jesus' public ministry in the light of the Easter revelation and, in other years a time for a review of some of the resurrection appearances of Jesus during the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension. McArthur 1958, 79, recognizes the beginning of Lent as a natural time for making a transit from the Galilean to the Judean phase of Jesus' ministry, but he also treats the weeks after Epiphany and the weeks of Lent as a unit since the ministry and passion of Jesus are one. Talley 1991, 130-132, indicates traditions arising in the second to fifth centuries of course readings from a Gospel account beginning on January 6, selected and arranged to arrive at the passion account at Passover time.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year One: First Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) (Baptism) 3:13-17, The Baptism of Jesus
- (2) 4:12-22, Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee and Calls the First Disciples
- (3) 5:1-12, The Beatitudes
- (4) 5:13-16, Parables of Salt and Light
- (5) 5:17-26, The Law and the Prophets; Concerning Anger
- (6) 5:27-37, Concerning Adultery; Divorce; Oaths
- (7) 5:38-48, Concerning Retaliation; Love for Enemies
- (8) 9:27-31; 20:29-34, Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

(9) (Last before Lent) 17:1-9, The Transfiguration

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) is the same passage that the *RCL* schedules for Baptism of the Lord (First Sunday after the Epiphany) in Year A. The theme of Baptism of the Lord is honored in the principal Gospel reading for preaching on this Sunday of the year in Years One (Matthew), Four (John – baptism of Jesus inferred), Six (Mark), and Fourteen (Luke). As mentioned above in the introduction to the season, in the years when the principal reading is not on baptism, the theme of baptism may be honored in introductory readings and rites or in the baptism of new members of the family and in the renewal of baptism for all the baptized in the assembly.

The readings for the Second Sunday to the Seventh Sunday after Epiphany closely parallel those in the *RCL*, Year A, except for adjustments necessary to retain adherence to the Gospel of Matthew rather than using on the second Sunday John 1:29-42, a portion of which this lectionary has scheduled for Baptism of the Lord in Year Four. Matthew 5:13-37 is spread over three Sundays rather than the two-Sunday distribution in the *RCL*.

The reading for the Eighth Sunday after Epiphany is a doublet (separate but similar passages in the same Gospel) which might be used homiletically to give advance notice of the transition that will come after the Ninth/Last Sunday from the Galilean Section of Matthew, Chapters 3-18 (Throckmorton 1992), in the Season after Epiphany to the Judean Section, Chapters 19-27, in the Season of Lent in this year's sequence of Gospel readings since the doublet spans the Galilean and Judean sections. The reading for the Eighth Sunday would not be used on the last Sunday before Lent if one follows the convention of always using the Ninth Sunday's reading on the Last before Lent.

The reading for the Ninth/Last Sunday after Epiphany is the same as the primary option for that Sunday in the *Revised Common Lectionary*, Year A.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Two: First Half-Year on MARK

- (1) (Baptism) 6:6b-13, The Mission of the Twelve
- (2) 6:30-34, Feeding the Five Thousand
- (3) 6:45-52, Jesus Walks on the Water
- (4) 6:53-56, Healing the Sick at Gennesaret
- (5) 7:1-23, The Tradition of the Elders
- (6) 7:24-30, The Syrophoenician Woman
- (7) 7:31-37, Jesus Cures a Deaf Man
- (8) 12:13-17, The Question about Paying Taxes
- (9) (Last before Lent), 11:27-33, Jesus' Authority is Questioned

The readings for the first to seventh Sundays are a semi-continuous series from chapters six and seven, beginning with The Mission of the Twelve which is about announcing the presence of God's kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel so that Israel might fulfill its destiny of being a light to the nations. This coheres thematically with the tradition of reading Matthew 2:1-12, The Visit of the Wise Men, on Epiphany Day, January 6. In years such as this one when the principal reading on Baptism of the Lord Sunday is not about baptism, the theme may be honored in introductory readings and rites or in the baptism of new members of the family and in the renewal of baptism for all the baptized in the assembly.

The reading of The Mission of the Twelve on the first Sunday is followed in the second to

seventh Sundays by The Feeding of the Five Thousand, which may be taken as a sign of the presence of the messianic kingdom, mighty works of healing and other signs of Jesus' authority over nature, a dispute with the Pharisees over how the tradition of the elders is applied to practical matters, and the encounter with the Syrophenician Woman, which may signal that Jesus is nearing a turning point from the Galilean ministry toward the consummation in Jerusalem and a shift from the redemption of the world through the reconstitution of Israel toward the redemption of the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. Vincent Taylor 1951 makes a strong case for such a turning point in Jesus' own perception of his mission and how it was to be accomplished. The typescript of my sermon developed and structured upon that proposition can be seen in Book I, Chapter V.

The readings for the eighth and ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are from the Judean section of Mark and are markers of Jesus' approaching final ordeal and encounter with the civil and religious authorities in Jerusalem.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Three: First Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) (Baptism) 6:12-16, Jesus Chooses the Twelve Apostles
- (2) 8:1-3, Some Women Accompany Jesus
- (3) 8:4-8, The Parable of the Sower
- (4) 8:9-15, The Parable of the Sower Explained
- (5) 8:16-18, A Lamp under a Jar
- (6) 8:22-25, Jesus Calms a Storm
- (7) 8:26-39, Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac
- (8) 8:40-42a, 49-56, A Girl Restored to Life

(9) (Last before Lent) 8:42b-48, A Woman Healed

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) is selected for the theme of Epiphany in that the enlistment of the apostles is a preparatory step toward the revelation of the kingdom to Israel and the whole world. The passage can also be related to the general theme of baptism and its connection with the call to discipleship.

The readings for the second to ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 8:1-56 which includes narration, a parable and interpretation, a teaching with an illustrative simile, and mighty works of healing, resuscitation, and command over nature. The only discontinuity is that 42b-48, A Woman Healed, has been extracted from 40-56 to be treated separately (but not as if unconnected) on the ninth (Last before Lent) Sunday. The faithful preacher may devote two Sundays (eighth and ninth) to preaching on 40-56 (a girl restored and a woman healed) in the most responsible way she is able. If there is an eighth but not a ninth Sunday, she will adapt accordingly, perhaps by preaching on 40-56 as the unit that it is. It is generally intended that the reading for the ninth Sunday (Last before Lent) be used on the last Sunday regardless of how many Sundays there are in the season after Epiphany in the current year.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Four: First Half-Year on JOHN

(1) (Baptism) 1:15, 29-34, The Lamb of God

(2) 1:35-42, The First Disciples of Jesus

(3) 1:43-51, Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

(4) 5:1-18, Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

(5) 5:31-40, Witnesses to Jesus

- (6) 5:41-47, 7:15-24, The Origin of the True Glory²⁰
- (7) 8:12-20, The Self Validation of Jesus
- (8) 8:21-30, Jesus Foretells His Death
- (9) (Last before Lent) 8:31-47, The Truth Will Make Free

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) is a selection from the reading assigned to the Second Sunday after Epiphany in Year A of the *RCL*, i.e., John 1:29-42. The passage seems to reflect the occasion of the baptism of Jesus as recounted in the Synoptic Gospels, although the baptism of Jesus is not specifically mentioned here.

The readings for the second and third Sundays complete a continuous series with the reading of the first Sunday and tell of the calling of the first disciples.

The readings of the fourth to sixth Sundays are a semi-continuous series from Chapter 5 with a related section, 7:15-24, appended to 5:41-47 on the sixth Sunday. This arrangement for the purpose of interpretation follows Bultmann 1971, 268-278.²⁰ The readings for these three Sundays comprise a healing on a Sabbath and a discourse on Jesus' authority to do Sabbath work.

The readings for the seventh to ninth Sundays are a continuous series on 8:12-47. Verse 12 is also included in the reading for the second Sunday of Lent in Year 12 of this lectionary where it is paired with 12:44-50, an arrangement for interpretation purposes suggested by Bultmann 1971, 342-347.²⁰

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Five: Second Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) (Baptism) 4:23-25, Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

- (2) 13:16-17, Blessed are the Disciples' Eyes and Ears
- (3) 14:13-21, The Feeding of the Five Thousand
- (4) 14:22-33, Jesus Walks on the Water
- (5) 14:34-36, Jesus Heals the Sick at Gennesaret
- (6) 15:1-20, The Tradition of the Elders
- (7) 15:21-28, The Canaanite Woman's Faith
- (8) 15:29-31, Jesus Cures Many People
- (9) (Last before Lent) 15:32-39, The Feeding of the Four Thousand

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) is a summary passage near the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry which tells of the quick spread of his fame throughout Galilee and beyond through his proclamation of the good news of the kingdom and through his curing of every disease and every sickness among the people. That is, it is about epiphany, the revelation of the Christ to the world.

The reading for the second Sunday is a comment of Jesus following a discussion of the purpose of speaking in parables. It raises questions about Jesus' early fame indicated in the passage of the previous Sunday. Did the crowds see the connection between his healing ministry and his preaching of the good news of the kingdom? To what extent was the epiphany in the words and works of Jesus effective?

The readings for the third to ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are a continuous series on 14:13 – 15:39. The section contains exemplary episodes in the Galilean ministry of Jesus, bracketed by The Feeding of the Five Thousand and The Feeding of the Four Thousand.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Six: Second Half-Year on MARK

- (1) (Baptism) 1:9-11, The Baptism of Jesus
- (2) 8:27-33, Peter's Declaration about Jesus, First Passion Prediction
- (3) 1:14-15, The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry
- (4) 1:16-20, Jesus Calls the First Disciples
- (5) 1:21-28, Jesus Teaches and Exorcises with Authority
- (6) 9:30-32, Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- (7) 1:29-39, Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House
- (8) 1:40-45, Jesus Cleanses a Leper
- (9) (Last before Lent) 9:1-9, The Transfiguration

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) is a portion of the reading (1:4-11) for Baptism of the Lord / First Sunday after the Epiphany in the *RCL* Year B. See Index of Gospel Readings for how other verses of the larger passage have been assigned in this lectionary.

The reading for the second Sunday includes Jesus' first of three predictions of his coming ordeal in Jerusalem. The second prediction follows four weeks later on the sixth Sunday, and the third prediction is scheduled for the second Sunday of Lent in this same liturgical year. The three predictions in Luke's rendition are arranged in the same way in Year Eleven and Matthew's presentation similarly in Year Fifteen. The rationale for this arrangement of Jesus' three predictions of his passion is given in the next to last paragraph of the "Preliminary Remarks" section of this chapter.

The readings for Sundays Three, Four, Five, Seven and Eight are a semi-continuous course

that approximates a portion of the series in the *RCL* Year B.

The reading for the sixth Sunday interrupts the above series with Jesus' second prediction of his passion. The rationale of this arrangement is given in the discussion of the first prediction at the second Sunday above and in the Preliminary Remarks section of this discussion chapter.

The reading for the Last Sunday before Lent, Mark 9:1-9 The Transfiguration, is one of the options in the *RCL* Year B.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Seven: Second Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) (Baptism) 14:25-35, The Cost of Discipleship
- (2) 11:37-44, The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees
- (3) 11:45-52, The Cruelty of the Lawyers
- (4) 11:53 – 12:1, The Treachery of the Pharisees
- (5) 12:22-34, Do Not Worry
- (6) 12:57-59, Settling with Your Opponent
- (7) 13:10-17, Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman
- (8) 13:22-30, The Narrow Door
- (9) (Last before Lent) 13:31-35, The Lament over Jerusalem

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) is a revelation (epiphany) of what the mission of Christ in the world requires, an important disclosure for any who would make the commitment signified in baptism, and a fitting introduction to a series of Jesus' teachings on discipleship in "Luke's Special Section" (Throckmorton 1992).

The readings for the second to ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are a semi-continuous series of Jesus' teachings on discipleship in 11:37 – 13:35 in Luke's Special Section. The discontinuities are the omission of 12:2-12, Bravely Trust and Obey the Holy Spirit, which is used on Pentecost Sunday in Year Three; 12:13-21, The Parable of the Rich Fool, which is used on the second Sunday of Easter in Year Fourteen; 12:35-48, Alert and Obedient Slaves, which is used on the first Sunday of Advent in Year Sixteen; 12:49-53, Jesus the Cause of Division, which is used on the first Sunday of Advent, Year Seven; 12:54-56, Interpreting the Time, which is used on the second Sunday of Advent, Year Seven; 13:1-9, Repent or Perish and The Barren Fig Tree, which is used on the third Sunday of Lent in Year Fourteen; and 13:18-21, Parables of The Mustard Seed and of The Yeast, which is used on the third Sunday of Easter in Year Fourteen.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Eight: Second Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) (Baptism) 2:1-12, The Wedding at Cana
- (2) 2:13-22, Jesus Cleanses the Temple
- (3) 4:43-54, Jesus Heals an Official's Son
- (4) 7:1-13, Jesus Goes to Jerusalem
- (5) 7:14, 25-29; 8:48-50, 54-55; 7:30, The Hiddenness of the Revelation²⁰
- (6) 7:37-44, 31-36, The Contingency of the Revelation²⁰
- (7) 7:45-52, The Unbelief of Those in Authority
- (8) 7:53 – 8:11, The Woman Caught in Adultery
- (9) (Last before Lent) 2:23 – 3:8, Nicodemus Visits Jesus

The reading for the Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first

Sunday after Epiphany) is The Wedding at Cana, a reading which the *RCL* schedules for the second Sunday after the Epiphany in Year C, the year nominally on Luke. Note that this lectionary schedules an excerpt from this passage, 2:3-5, Jesus and His Mother, at Year 4: First Half-Year on John, second Sunday of Christmas.

The reading for the second Sunday is continuous with the above. This placement of the temple action in the Gospel of John and at this point in this lectionary is consistent with the exegetical and liturgical treatment of it as a sign or revelation (epiphany) of the arrival of the new age introduced by Messiah. The *RCL* schedules this passage for the third Sunday of Lent of Year B, its year nominally on Mark.

The reading for the third Sunday, Jesus Heals an Official's Son, is another sign or revelation (epiphany) of the presence of God's reign in Jesus. The *RCL* does not schedule this passage for any Sunday.

The readings for the fourth to eighth Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 7:1 – 8:11. The arrangement and divisions here follow Bultmann 1971, 295-306.²⁰ The section missing here, 7:15-24, is scheduled for the sixth Sunday after the Epiphany in Year Four of this lectionary where it is mated with 5:41-47 under the heading "The Origin of the True Glory," following Bultmann, 1971, 268-278.²⁰ The *RCL* lists 7:37-39 as an alternate reading for the Day of Pentecost in Year A. The other verses in 7:1 – 8:11 are not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*. The verses scheduled here for the eighth Sunday, 7:53 – 8:11, The Woman Caught in Adultery, are lacking in the most ancient authorities according to a footnote in the New Revised Standard Version, and they are not treated in Bultmann 1971. Perhaps these verses were inherited orally, or created, and inserted by a scribe at a relatively late date in the early times of manual transmission of the manuscript sources of the New Testament. However, according to the concepts of canonical criticism as presented in James Sanders

1984, these verses must have had a particular value and usefulness to a community of faith at some time. And, of course, the Christian church continues to find value in this passage. I comment on another passage that is questioned textually, Mark 16:9-20, “The Longer Ending of Mark,” at Easter Sunday, Year Ten, in this “Discussion of Gospel Selections by Seasons.”

The reading for the ninth (Last before Lent) Sunday touches on Jesus’ caution about professions of belief and his radical view of genuine spiritual rebirth. The *RCL* schedules 3:1-17 as an alternate reading for the second Sunday of Lent in Year A and as the Gospel reading for Trinity Sunday in Year B.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Nine: Third Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) (Baptism) 9:32-34, Jesus Heals One Who Was Mute
- (2) 9:35-38, The Harvest is Great, the Laborers Few
- (3) 10:1-16, The Mission of the Twelve
- (4) 10:17-25, Coming persecutions
- (5) 10:26-33, Encouragement to Fearless Confession
- (6) 10:34-39, Not Peace, but a Sword
- (7) 10:40 – 11:1, Rewards
- (8) 11:20-24, Woes to Unrepentant Cities
- (9) (Last before Lent) 11:25-30, Jesus Thanks His Father.

The readings are a semi-continuous series on 9:32 to 11:30 encompassing a major missionary and expansion effort of the Galilean ministry of Jesus and the twelve apostles. The only discontinuities are the omission of 11:2-11, Jesus Praises John the Baptist, which is scheduled for Year One,

Advent 3, and the omission of 11:12-19, A Fickle Generation, which is scheduled for Year Thirteen, Advent 2.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Ten: Third Half-Year on MARK

- (1) (Baptism) 2:13-17, Jesus Calls Levi
- (2) 2:23-28, Pronouncement about the Sabbath
- (3) 3:1-6, The Man with the Withered Hand
- (4) 3:7-12, A Multitude at the Seaside
- (5) 3:13-19, Jesus Appoints the Twelve
- (6) 3:22-30, Jesus and Beelzebul
- (7) 4:35-41, Jesus Stills a Storm
- (8) 5:1-20, Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac
- (9) (Last before Lent) 5:21-43, Jesus Restores a Girl, Heals a Woman

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) records a moment of epiphany for Levi and also for the fault-finding scribes of the Pharisees.

The readings for the second to ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are a semi-continuous series with the reading for the first Sunday and encompass some of Jesus' teachings, mighty works of healing and command of nature, and the appointment of the twelve apostles. The passage scheduled for the third Sunday, the Man with a Withered Hand, has a parallel in Matthew which is scheduled for Year 9 at the Second Sunday of Lent. I discuss this exceptional scheduling of parallels in successive years in the last paragraph of the "Preliminary Remarks" section of this chapter.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Eleven: Third Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) (Baptism) 9:1-6, The Mission of the Twelve
- (2) 9:10-17, The Feeding of the Five Thousand
- (3) 9:18-22, Peter's Declaration about Jesus, Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- (4) 9:23-27, The Conditions of Discipleship
- (5) 9:37-43a, Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon
- (6) 9:43b-45, Jesus Again Foretells His Death
- (7) 9:46-48, True Greatness
- (8) 9:49-50, Another Exorcist
- (9) (Last before Lent) 11:24-26, The Return of the Unclean Spirit

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany), The Mission of the Twelve, is about announcing the presence of God's kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel so that Israel might fulfill its destiny of being a light to the nations.

The readings for the first to eighth Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 9:1-50. The discontinuities are the omission of 9:7-9, Herod's Perplexity, which was used at the second Sunday of Christmas in this year (Eleven) and 9:28-36, The Transfiguration, which is used in Year Fourteen on the ninth Sunday after Epiphany (Last before Lent). The reading for the third Sunday includes Jesus' first of three predictions of his coming ordeal at Jerusalem. The second prediction follows three weeks later on the sixth Sunday, and the account of the third prediction is scheduled for the first Sunday of Lent in this same liturgical year. The rationale for this arrangement of Jesus's three

predictions of his passion is given in the next to last paragraph of the “Preliminary Remarks” section of this chapter.

The reading for the ninth (Last before Lent) Sunday, The Return of the Unclean Spirit, may serve as a transition to the penitential season of Lent when it is important to replace evil with good rather than merely expel self-destructive habits.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Twelve: Third Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) (Baptism) 6:1-15, Feeding the Five Thousand
- (2) 9:1-12, A Man Born Blind Receives Sight
- (3) 9:13-23, The Pharisees Investigate the Healing
- (4) 9:24-41, 10:19-21, Controversy Among the Jews²⁰
- (5) 10:22-39, Jesus is Rejected by the Jews
- (6) 10:40-42, 11:54, Jesus Turns from the Jews²⁰
- (7) 11:45-54, The Plot to Kill Jesus
- (8) 11:55-57, Will Jesus Come to Jerusalem?
- (9) (Last before Lent) 12:1-8, Mary Anoints Jesus

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) Feeding the Five Thousand, is a sign (epiphany) of the presence and coming of the messianic kingdom.

The readings for the second to ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 9:1 to 12:8. The discontinuities are in the rearrangement of verses at Sundays four and six. On the fourth Sunday 10:19-21 is paired with 9:24-41 and on the sixth Sunday 11:54 is paired with 10:40-

42. These arrangements are suggested by Bultmann 1971 in which 9:24-41 and 10:19-21 are both contained in a section styled The Light of the World, pp. 329-357, and 10:40-42 and 11:54 are both contained in a section called Decision for Death, pp. 393-409.²⁰

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Thirteen: Fourth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) (Baptism) 2:1-12, The Visit of the Wise Men
- (2) 8:1-4, Jesus Cleanses a Leper
- (3) 8:5-13, Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant
- (4) 8:14-17, Jesus Heals Many at Peter's House
- (5) 8:18-27, Would-Be Followers of Jesus
- (6) 8:28-34, Jesus Heals the Gadarene Demoniacs
- (7) 9:1-8, Jesus Heals a Paralytic
- (8) 9:9-13, The Call of Matthew
- (9) (Last before Lent), 9:14-17, The Question about Fasting

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) The Visit of the Wise Men, is the same as the reading for Epiphany of the Lord (January 6) for years A, B, and C in the *RCL*.

The readings for the second to ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are a continuous series on 8:1 – 9:17 encompassing five mighty works of healing by Jesus (“sign events” as Tillich, 1951, 115, calls them), a word of warning to would-be followers of Jesus, the call of Matthew, and the question about fasting. The only part of this section scheduled in the *RCL* is 9:9-13, The Call of Matthew (with 9:18-26), on the Sunday between June 5 and 11 in Year A. The reading for the Ninth or Last

Sunday after Epiphany should always be used on the Sunday before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Fourteen: Fourth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) (Baptism) 3:15-17, 21-22, The Baptism of Jesus
- (2) 3:23-38, The Ancestors of Jesus
- (3) 4:14-21, Teaching Begins, Return to Nazareth
- (4) 4:22-30, Rejection at Nazareth
- (5) 5:1-11, Jesus Calls the First Disciples
- (6) 6:17-26, Blessings and Woes
- (7) 6:27-36, Love for Enemies
- (8) 6:37-42, Judging Others
- (9) (Last before Lent), 9:28-36, The Transfiguration

The reading for Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany), The Baptism of Jesus, is the same as the reading for Baptism of the Lord / First Sunday after the Epiphany in the *RCL* Year C.

The reading for the Second Sunday, The Ancestors of Jesus, is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The readings for Sundays Three to Nine are the same as in the *RCL* Year C except that the break between the Seventh Sunday and the Eighth Sunday is between 6:36 and 6:37 rather than between 6:38 and 6:39, and the reading for the Eighth Sunday ends at 6:42 rather than 6:49. Luke 6:43-45, A Tree and Its Fruit, is scheduled for the Second Sunday of Lent in the current year of this

lectionary. Luke 6:46-49, The Two Foundations, is scheduled for the Second Sunday of Easter in Year Eleven, the Third Half-Year on Luke, in this lectionary.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Fifteen: Fifth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) (Baptism) 17:14-21, Jesus Cures a Boy with a Demon
- (2) 16:21-23, Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- (3) 16:24-28, The Cross of Self-Denial
- (4) 6:24-34, Serving Two Masters; Do Not Worry
- (5) 20:1-16, The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard
- (6) 17:22-23, Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- (7) 25:14-30, The Parable of the Talents
- (8) 6:1-6, Concerning Almsgiving and Prayer
- (9) (Last before Lent) 6:16-18, Concerning Fasting

The reading for Baptism of the Lord, Jesus Cures a Boy with a Demon, (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany) reports a moment of revelation (epiphany), not only of the power of Jesus' faith but also of the power of faith that is available to all people.

The reading for the second Sunday is Jesus' first prediction of his death and resurrection.

The second of the three predictions by Jesus is scheduled four weeks later at the sixth Sunday of this season and the third prediction is scheduled for the second Sunday of Lent of this year. The rationale for this arrangement of the three predictions of the passion is given in the next to last paragraph of the "Preliminary Remarks" section of this discussion chapter.

The reading for the third Sunday is canonically continuous with the reading for the second

Sunday and moves from the necessity of sacrifice by Jesus to the necessity of sacrifice by those who would follow him and announces the imminence of the ultimate reward of such self-denial upon the glorious return of the Son of Man.

The reading for the fourth Sunday, on the impossibility of serving God and also serving one's own material security, continues from the third Sunday the theme of the singular commitment and devotion required for discipleship and service to God.

The readings for the fifth and seventh Sundays are two parables of Jesus, the first given during the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and the second given during the days in Jerusalem (Throckmorton 1992). The first, Laborers in the Vineyard, may be seen as addressing the tension between God's grace and religious institutions and the second, The Talents, the tension between venture and conservation, that is, risk and caution, in discipleship.

The readings for the eighth and ninth (Last before Lent) Sundays are from the sermon on the mount about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. They can serve as a lead-in to the penitential season of Lent.

Baptism/Epiphany, Year Sixteen: Fifth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) (Baptism) 4:31-37, The Man with an Unclean Spirit
- (2) 4:38-44, Healings at Simon's House
- (3) 5:12-16, Jesus Cleanses a Leper
- (4) 5:17-26, Jesus Heals a Paralytic
- (5) 5:27-32, Jesus Calls Levi
- (6) 5:33-39, The Question about Fasting
- (7) 6:1-5, The Question about the Sabbath

- (8) 6:6-11, The Man with a Withered Hand
- (9) (Last before Lent), 11:14-23, Jesus and Beelzebul

The readings for this season after Epiphany are from the Galilean Section of Luke, except the Last Sunday which is from Luke's Special Section.

The reading for the first Sunday, Baptism of the Lord (Epiphany Day if January 6 is on Sunday, otherwise first Sunday after Epiphany), The Man with an Unclean Spirit, is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*. Here, Jesus' authority is revealed in his manner of teaching, his identity as "the Holy One of God" is revealed in the words of the unclean spirit, and his power is revealed in his silencing and expelling of the unclean spirit, a triple epiphany!

The reading for the second Sunday makes a connected pair with the first Sunday and is also not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

The readings for the third to eighth Sundays are a continuous series from the fifth and sixth chapters. They are not scheduled for any Sundays in the *RCL*.

The reading for the ninth (Last before Lent) Sunday, Jesus and Beelzebul, is a passage from Luke's special section that is not used in the *RCL*. A parallel in Mark 3:20-35 is used by the *RCL* in Year B, June 5-11.

4. Season of Lent

While Christians are invited to observe the days of Lent in self-examining reflection and other penitential practices in preparation for Easter, the *Sundays* of Lent retain the fundamental festal character of Sunday, according to Bonneau 1998, 95. The Sunday Gospel readings in the sixteen Lenten seasons of this lectionary are mainly semi-continuous series selected from both the Galilean

and the Judean sections of Jesus' ministry but with a preference as much as possible for teachings, mighty works (sign events), and encounters that point toward the consummation of his earthly ministry in the crisis at Jerusalem or that happened as Jesus and the disciples proceeded south for the last time from Galilee to Judaea, or that happened in Jerusalem and the nearby countryside and villages.

In years Two, Three, Five, Eight, and Thirteen, the Lenten series violates the familiar caution against making Lent a long-and-drawn-out holy-hell-week-of-Sundays on the events of the passion of Jesus as the Christ. My reason for disregarding that caution in those years is based on my conviction that the texts of the passion narratives should be read and expounded in preaching at Sunday services in addition to being liturgically read, dramatized and set to music in whole accounts during the special holy week services. It is expected that such proclamation and exposition at the Sunday morning services during Lent will enhance rather than interfere with or detract from the liturgical reading or dramatization or musical interpretation of whole passion narratives on Passion/Palm Sunday and at Holy Week and Easter Vigil services. In addition, it is expected that getting into the text through extended reading, drama, and music may enhance the preaching events. It depends partly on execution, readiness, and how the breeze of God's Breath blows among the people and their worship leaders. Wink 1980 has shown how biblical teaching and Bible study are much more likely to be a life-transforming experience if people can be involved in a scriptural episode by way of some physical posing, dramatic portrayal, artistic imagining, impromptu acting-out, or musical involvement - especially if the stage is set by an accompanying brief verbal historical and theological orientation to the text.

Gardner C. Taylor 1977, 100, 110-111, in his sermon "A Crown of Thorns," which is Number 2 in his Lenten series "The Road to Calvary," discusses how there have been times when

dramatic or imaginative focus on the physical and psychological agony of Jesus in the passion narrative has descended into such morbid detail that any theological perspective or interpretation of the meaning of the passion with respect to human sin and redemption and divine judgment and grace was ignored, avoided, or obfuscated. That can be a problem in various art forms that might be on display during Lent and especially during Holy Week, including the art of preaching and the art of cinema. A case in point might be *The Sacrifice of Christ*, a film produced by Mel Gibson, if viewed without preparatory and follow-up theological teaching and discussion. I would hope that the leaders of any such preparation and unpacking of the film experience, along with any preachers who would prepare expository sermons on texts from the passion narratives of the Gospels, would be conversant with the church's history of interpreting the atonement of sinful humanity which is in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. There is a summary perspective and selective review of that history in Tillich 1957, 170-180. Tillich discusses the advantages and disadvantages and possible renovation of the historically dominant Anselmian substitutionary sacrifice or satisfaction theology of the atonement in Christ. Some of the elements of Tillich's discussion are incorporated here. The early church's leading theological teachers, a.k.a. fathers, did not strive to produce a unified atonement theology as they did with christological teaching. Thus, several understandings of the process of the atonement in Christ were allowed to develop and coexist through the centuries. Each of the different approaches contains an objective aspect (what God has done and promises to do) and a subjective element (the human response which is integral to the effectual completion of God's atoning action). But some of them dwell more on the objective side, e.g., Christus Victor – the love of God in Christ overcomes the demonic powers of the world's domination systems, expressed by Paul (Romans 8:38-39, Ephesians 4:7-10), and by Origen (c. 185-254), and revisited by Aulén 1960 in his own historical review of atonement theologies, and by Wink 1992 in *Engaging*

the Powers, and by Borg 1994,1997, 2001, 2003, where he discusses the power of God over the world's domination systems portrayed in the history of Israel and the work of Jesus as the Christ. A second teaching that emphasizes the objective side of atonement is that of Christ as the substitute for the sacrifice owed by the human race, articulated by Paul (Romans 3:24-25) and Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). But there have also been prominent teachings in the history of Christianity that focused on the subjective side of the atonement in Christ, that is, human love responds to God's love portrayed in the self-surrendering love of Christ the crucified, expressed in the letters of John, especially 1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us," and developed theologically by Abelard (1079-1142). Eventually the view that came to have dominance in the popular mind, in church music and other religious art, and in the teaching of the church is that of Anselm set forth and explained in his *Cur Deus Homo* which is included in Anselm of Canterbury 1954, 171-288. The persistent dominance of the Anselmian doctrine in both the popular mind of Christians and in church hymnody and other religious art and in official and informal church teaching is partly attributable to that doctrine's thorough accounting for the satisfaction of the honor, justice and righteousness that are inherent in the being of God. Tillich sees a correlation of that ontological/legal rationale with an insight from modern clinical psychology: The grace of self-forgiveness and psychic healing may be free but it is not cheap or without pain and psychic discomfort. It is necessary for persons to go through the torment of insight into their own existential being as parties to the guilt of human revolt against God and the consequent alienation from God and estrangement from one another before any healing or atonement can be experienced. But that psychological work does not suffice to fulfill the necessary function of the subjective side of the working of atonement.

Objections have been raised against Anselm's legalistic/rationalistic exposition and dated language, i.e., language that is reflective of medieval culture and worldviews, both material and

spiritual. More importantly, Tillich picks up on the inadequacy of the concept of substitution which Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in his critique of Anselm's work would have replaced with the concept of participation. The word substitution tends to put all the weight of atonement on the objective side, God's action, and does not adequately encompass the important function of the subjective side, the human response to God's action and God's promises in Christ. Tillich suggests that as Christ participates in the predicament of humankind in a world of hurt and sinful separation and alienation from God and one another, so in order for the atonement transaction to be complete, humankind must participate empathically in Christ's participation in our predicament of sinful revolt and estrangement and his ultimate sacrifice and victory in the cross and the resurrection to new life. Vicarious suffering is a two-way street or else it is not effectual unto salvation—healing, wholeness, and hope. Howard Cosell, the erudite sports journalist, was sometimes heard to comment after a severely bruising collision on the football field that “there was a lot of vicarious suffering going on down there.” He meant that some of the higher and lesser paid gladiators were taking a lot of physical punishment to pay the cost of the struggle so that the respective team owners, sponsoring institutions, supporters and fans did not have to pay that price directly in their own bodies. But that would not bring an effectual and healthy experience of re-creation to those team supporters unless they also participated vicariously in the players' vicarious and very real participation in the painful cost of the struggle. Definitions two and three of vicarious in Merriam Webster 2003 are both needed here. “**2:** performed or suffered by one person as substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another **3:** experienced or realized through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another.” Thus, as the Christ suffered vicariously with and for us through Jesus in our common lot of life and death, so we are to suffer vicariously with him in his brutal torture, insults, and death. Perhaps viewing the gruesome torture of Jesus' vicarious suffering for us as

portrayed in the film, *The Sacrifice of Christ* could lead people into a deeper and higher and more edifying life of suffering vicariously *with* Christ if there were a proper theological educational preparation and follow-up with the screening of the film.

Here is another example of two-way vicarious participation, one that relates directly to the symbols of the Temple sacrificial system of ancient Israel which have attached so firmly to the sacrifice of Christ. According to E. P. Sanders 2005, some of the Jewish families that have traveled a long distance across ancient Israel to bring their animal sacrifices to a religious festival at Jerusalem did not have friends or relatives in Jerusalem with whom they might lodge, and would usually be encamped in the vicinity of the Temple. If the sacrificial animal has been brought from home rather than purchased from the sellers in and around the Temple courtyards, perhaps that animal has been housed in close quarters with the family, rather like a family pet. The Priests and Levites would slaughter and flay the family's offering on a big stone altar in the Temple courtyard and return a portion of the meat to the family to be roasted on their campfire and consumed for sustenance. Thus, the family participated vicariously in their animal's total sacrifice as the price of atoning for the family's life of inherent sinful separation from full communion with God and others.

When it comes to answering the question implied in Anselm's title, *Cur Deus Homo* — why God had to appear as a human for the work of atonement to be accomplished — Anselm seems to have taken his scriptural cues from the Temple sacrificial system of ancient Israel detailed in Leviticus and applied to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb taken from the flock that is God's human family in Romans 3:24-25, "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith." And it would appear that Tillich took his scriptural cues from Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created" and 2 Corinthians 5:17 "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" and Acts 17:28 "For 'In him we live and move and have

our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'" Thus, in Tillich's ontological approach humans can become new beings through the atonement only as God, the Essence of Being Itself, appears existentially in Jesus as the Christ, the Bearer of the New Being to the world. Thus, according to the "Good Book," Anselm and Tillich are "both right," to borrow a phrase from Tevya in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tillich's ontological approach is not so far removed from the classic philosophical ways of the medieval Schoolmen such as Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham (mentioned in a Wikipedia article on *Ontology* accessed March 6, 2024). Have I mentioned that I think of Paul Tillich as the premier Schoolman – Scholastic Theologian – of the 20th century? Yes, in Book I, n. 3, which see.³ (Book I Notes)

Tillich's 1957, 170-180, discussion of "Doctrine of Atonement" is in a section, 165-180, headed "The New Being in Jesus as the Christ as the Power of Salvation," in which he discusses, 165-168, "The Meaning of Salvation," 168-170, "The Christ as the Savior" and, 176-180, "The Threefold Character of Salvation: a) Salvation as Participation in the New Being (Regeneration), b) Salvation as Acceptance of the New Being (Justification) and c) Salvation as Transformation by the New Being (Sanctification). Another perspective can be seen in Borg 1997, 158-167, where he reflects on the experience of salvation in terms of biblical images: "Bondage and Liberation," "Estrangement and Reconciliation," "Salvation as Enlightenment," "Salvation as Forgiveness," "Salvation as Experiencing the Love of God," "Salvation as Resurrection," "Salvation as Food and Drink," "Salvation as Knowing God," and "Salvation as the Kingdom of God." A preacher developing a series of sermons on texts from the passion narrative of one of the Gospels will, of course, resort to a round of serious biblical commentaries on the text at hand for each sermon. She or he may also find help in meditative reading of theological perspectives on the meaning of salvation and atonement through encounter with Jesus as the Christ, such as those of Tillich and Borg

mentioned here. A series of expository sermons on texts selected from the passion narrative in one of the Gospel accounts may be designed to include appropriate theological orientation all along the way. The aim would be to help people experience vicariously in a disturbing but redemptive way, something of the suffering of the Christ as depicted in the scripture reading, the hymns and anthems, and other artistic expressions of the passion during Lent and Holy Week. Thus, with theological and gospel purpose in mind, the preacher and other worship leaders would work carefully to avoid any aimless dwelling on the morbid details of the torture, insults and agony of Jesus' suffering and death.

On the other hand, a skeptic would not be easily swayed by theological preachments but might be more likely to have their heart initially softened and opened by encountering an especially beautiful and deeply moving artistic product or performance, and thus, become more receptive to the theological teaching and good news proclamation in scripture, sermon and sacrament. The relationship between artistic expression and theological interpretation of the passion of Christ is definitely a two-way street, or perhaps a roundabout, with new spiritual, theological, experiential traffic entering and departing the circle all around the way. So much for my extended discussion regarding the designation in this lectionary of texts from the passion narratives of the Gospels as principal readings for the Sundays of Lent in years Two, Three, Five, Eight and Thirteen.

Lent, Year One: First Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 6:7-9, Hallowed be Your Name
- (2) 6:10, Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be Done
- (3) 6:11, Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread
- (4) 6:12, And Forgive Us Our Debts...

- (5) 6:13, And Do Not Bring Us to the Time of Trial...
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 6:14-15, For if You Forgive...

The readings for the first to sixth (Passion/Palm) Sundays are a continuous series on 6:7-15, the petitions of Matthew's presentation of the Lord's Prayer. The preacher who insistently studies several of the current best commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew and carefully exegetes the situation of her own here-and-now environment will preach significantly different sermons from the ones that she might preach in Lent of Year Seven on Luke's presentation of the Lord's Prayer, preferably without making very much public reference to the similarities and differences between the setting in Matthew and the setting in Luke. I commented on this in the third paragraph of the "Preliminary Remarks" section of this chapter.

Lent, Year Two: First Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 14:1-2, 10-11, The Plot to Kill Jesus
- (2) 14:3-9, The Anointing at Bethany
- (3) 14:12-16, Preparation for the Passover
- (4) 14:17-21, Jesus Predicts his Betrayal
- (5) 14:22-25, Institution of the Lord's Supper
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 11:12-26, Fig Tree; Temple; Fig Tree

The readings for the first to fifth Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 14:1-25, a portion of the passion narrative in Mark. I commented at length in the second paragraph of the introduction to the Season of Lent about reading and preaching on passages from the passion narratives during Lent.

The only discontinuity here is that 3-9, The Anointing at Bethany, has been extracted from 1-11, the Plot to Kill Jesus, for a separate reading on the second Sunday.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday includes the cursing of the fig tree, the cleansing of the temple and the lesson from the withered fig tree. The passage is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*. These prophetic signs of the messianic crisis at Jerusalem follow immediately upon Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem in the Synoptic accounts. Mark's account of the Triumphal Entry is scheduled for Passion/Palm Sunday in Year Six.

Lent, Year Three: First Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 22:39-46, Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives
- (2) 22:47-53, Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
- (3) 22:54-71, The Failure of Religion
- (4) 23:1-25, Jesus before Pilate, Herod, Jesus Sentenced to Death
- (5) 23:26-43, The Crucifixion of Jesus
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 23:44-56, The Death and Burial of Jesus

The readings are a continuous series on 22:39 – 23:56, a portion of the passion narrative according to Luke. I commented in the introduction to the Season of Lent about reading and preaching on passages from the passion narratives at Sunday services during Lent.

Lent, Year Four: First Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 3:9-15, As Moses Lifted the Serpent
- (2) 3:16-21, God So Loved The World

- (3) 4:1-15, Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, 1
- (4) 4:16-30, Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, 2
- (5) 4:31-42, Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, 3
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 12:20-36, Jesus Speaks about His Death

The readings for the first to fifth Sundays of Lent are a semi-continuous reading of 3:9 – 4:42. The discontinuities are that 3:22-30 and 3:31-36 are reserved for the second and third Sundays of Advent in year 12. The *RCL* schedules 3:1-17 as an alternate reading for the second Sunday of Lent in Year A and for Trinity Sunday in Year B. It schedules 3:14-21 for the fourth Sunday of Lent in Year B and 4:5-42 for the third Sunday of Lent in Year A.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday is a passage that the *RCL* schedules for Tuesday of Holy Week in Years A, B, and C. It is appropriate that the passage also be proclaimed in reading and preaching at the chief Lord's Day service on this Passion/Palm Sunday, which will enhance rather than detract from its being read liturgically on Holy Tuesday each year in churches where that is part of the tradition for Holy Week devotion.

Lent, Year Five: Second Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 26:36-46, Jesus Prays in Gethsemane
- (2) 26:47-56, Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
- (3) 26:69-75, Peter's Denial of Jesus
- (4) 27:1-2, 11-14, Pilate Questions Jesus
- (5) 27:15-26, Pilate Hands Jesus over to be Crucified
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 27:45-56, The Death of Jesus

The readings are a semi-continuous series on 26:36 – 27:56, episodes in the week of Jesus' date with destiny in Jerusalem. The discontinuity is that the skipped verses are reserved for a similar series in Lent of Year Thirteen. I commented in the introduction to the season of Lent about reading and preaching on passages from the passion narrative during Lent.

Lent, Year Six: Second Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 1:12-13, The Temptation of Jesus
- (2) 10:32-34, A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- (3) 9:14-29, The Healing of a Boy with a Spirit
- (4) 9:33-37, Who is the Greatest?
- (5) 10:35-45, The Request of James and John
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 11:1-11, Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

The reading for the first Sunday is a portion of that in the *RCL* Year B, Mark 1:9-15. The verses omitted here, 9-11, The Baptism of Jesus, and 14-15, The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry, are used respectively on the first and third Sundays of the Season after Epiphany Day/Ordinary Time in this Year Six. The two verses scheduled here contain Mark's brief (compared to (Matthew's and Luke's accounts) summary account of Jesus being put to the test by Satan in preparation for the trials of his divine mission. At this time, he affirmed his trust in God; and God's spiritual messengers took care of him.

The reading for the second Sunday is the last of Jesus' three predictions of his passion. The first and second predictions are scheduled at the second and sixth Sundays after Epiphany Day of

this Year Six. The rationale for this arrangement is given in the next to last paragraph of the “Preliminary Remarks” section of this chapter.

The reading for the third Sunday, The Healing of a Boy with a Spirit, is part of the follow on to the Transfiguration, 9:2-8, which is scheduled for the Last Sunday before Lent in this Year Six. The intervening question and answer about The Coming of Elijah, 9:9-13, is scheduled for the second Sunday of Advent in Year 2, where I discuss that placement.

The readings for the fourth and fifth Sundays are paired not only for their common theme but for the irony of their canonical setting, so close to each other and in such close proximity to Jesus’ three predictions of his coming sacrifice, coupled with his teaching about receiving the kingdom as a **child which is part and parcel of the passage scheduled for the fourth Sunday, 9:33-37, and his** repetition of this teaching when he receives and blesses the children brought to him, 10:13-16. All of this might have reminded the disciples of what Jesus had taught them following his first prediction of his suffering, the necessity of self-denial and sacrifice by those who would follow him, 8:34. But the disciples only keep reiterating the same dullness, not understanding what Jesus is talking about.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday agrees with the first option for the Liturgy of the Palms in the *RCL*, Year B. I have subdivided the first option for the principal reading on Passion/Palm Sunday in the *RCL* Year B, Mark 14:1 – 15:47, the Passion Narrative from the arrest to the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, and used those pericopes in the Season of Lent and the Season of Easter, Year Two, First Half-Year on Mark. I discussed this arrangement in the introduction to the Season of Lent above. And I discuss below at the Season of Easter, Year Two, the matter of reading and preaching from a portion of the passion narrative during the Sundays of the Easter Season.

Lent, Year Seven: Second Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 11:2a, Hallowed be Your Name
- (2) 11:2b, Your Kingdom Come
- (3) 11:3, Give Us Each Day Our Daily Bread
- (4) 11:4a, And Forgive us Our Sins...
- (5) 11:4b, And Do Not Bring Us to the Time of Trial...
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 11:29-32, The Sign of Jonah

The readings for Sundays one to five are a continuous series on 11:2-4, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer according to Luke's transcription. I discussed treating the petitions of the Lord's Prayer in the third paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter and in Lent of Year One which has Matthew's setting of the Lord's Prayer.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday does not mention the parallel between Jonah's time in the belly of the sea monster and the time that the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth, as in Matthew 12:40, Year 9, Passion/Palm. But this passage in Luke does assert as Matthew 12:40 does that the evil generation will be judged for failing to heed the sign of Jesus' preaching and wisdom, unlike the attentiveness of the queen of the South who came from far away to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and also unlike the people of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah.

Lent, Year Eight: Second Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 18:1-11, The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
- (2) 18:12-27, Jesus before the High Priest
- (3) 18:28 – 19:7, Jesus before Pilate, I

- (4) 19:7-16, Jesus before Pilate, II
- (5) 19:17-27, The Crucifixion of Jesus (Note: Verses 25-27 are also scheduled above at Year 8, Christmas 2, “Jesus and His Mother.”)
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 19:28-42, The Death and Burial of Jesus

The readings are a continuous series on 18:1 – 19:42, which verses comprise most of the passion narrative according to John. I commented in the introduction to the Season of Lent about reading and preaching on passages from the passion narrative during Lent.

Lent, Year Nine: Third Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 12:1-8, Plucking Grain on a Sabbath
- (2) 12:9-14, The Man with a Withered Hand
- (3) 12: 15-21, God’s Chosen Servant
- (4) 12:22-30, A Demoniac Cured, Jesus and Beelzebul
- (5) 12:33-37, A Tree and Its Fruit
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 12:38-42, The Sign of Jonah.

The readings are a semi-continuous series on 12:1 – 12:42. The only discontinuity is the omission of 12:31-32 on the sin of blasphemy against the Spirit, which is scheduled for Pentecost Sunday of this year. The present series comprises teachings, mighty works (“sign events” as Tillich 1951, 115 calls them), and Sabbath controversies. The passage scheduled for the Second Sunday, The Man with a Withered Hand, has a parallel in Mark which is scheduled for Year 10, Third Sunday after Epiphany. I discussed this exceptional scheduling of parallels in successive years in the last

paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter.

Lent, Year Ten: Third Half-Year on MARK

- (1) 8:1-10, Feeding the Four Thousand
- (2) 8:11-13, The Demand for a Sign
- (3) 8:14-21, The Yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod
- (4) 8:22-26, Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida
- (5) 2:1-12, Jesus Heals a Paralytic
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 8:34 – 9:1, The Cost of Discipleship.

The readings for Sundays one to four are a continuous series from Chapter 8 which includes mighty works (“sign events” as Tillich 1951, 115, calls them) of feeding and healing that bracket cautions about the demand for signs and about the infectious influence of the teaching (yeast) of the Pharisees and of Herod.

The reading for the Fifth Sunday, Jesus Heals a Paralytic, completes the readings from second chapter of Mark in the current year, distributed as follows: Fourth Sunday of Advent: 18-22 The Presence of the Bridegroom; Baptism / First Sunday of Epiphany: 13-17 Jesus Calls Levi; Second Sunday of Epiphany: 23-28 Pronouncement about the Sabbath; Fifth Sunday of Lent: 1-12 Jesus Heals a Paralytic.

The reading for the sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm), The Cost of Discipleship, completes the semi continuous Lenten series from the eighth chapter of Mark. The only missing passage is 27-33 Peter’s Declaration about Jesus and the First Prediction of the Passion, which has been scheduled in Year Six, Epiphany 2, and followed in the same year by Jesus’ second and third predictions of his

sacrifice and victory, at Epiphany 6 and Lent 2. I discussed this lectionary's arrangement of Jesus' three predictions of his passion in each of the Synoptic Gospels in the next to last paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter.

Lent, Year Eleven: Third Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 18:31-34, A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death
- (2) 22:1-6, The Plot to Kill Jesus
- (3) 22:7-13, The Preparation of the Passover
- (4) 22:21-23, Jesus Predicts His Betrayal
- (5) 22:31-34, Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 9:28-40, Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

The reading for the first Sunday completes the trilogy of Jesus' predictions of his death and resurrection. The previous two predictions are scheduled for Epiphany 3 and Epiphany 6 of this year. The rationale for this arrangement of the three predictions is given in the next to last paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter.

The readings for the second to fifth Sundays are a semi-continuous series of selections from Chapter 22, words and actions of Jesus and the apostles during the days in Jerusalem that point toward the approaching completion of Christ's walk in the flesh.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday is the same as in the Liturgy of the Palms entry rite in the *RCL Year C*.

Lent, Year Twelve: Third Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) 12:37-43, The Unbelief of the People
- (2) 8:12, 12:44-50, Jesus the Light of the World²⁰
- (3) 13:1-11, The Foot Washing and the First Interpretation of It
- (4) 13:12-20, The Second Interpretation of the Foot Washing
- (5) 13:21-30, Jesus Foretells his Betrayal
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 12:9-19, Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

The readings for the first to fifth Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 12:37 – 13:30. The discontinuity is that on the second Sunday 8:12 has been paired with 12:44-50. This arrangement follows Bultmann 1971, 342-347.²⁰

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday includes the passage that the *RCL* has as an alternate reading for Passion/Palm Sunday of Year B.

Lent, Year Thirteen: Fourth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 26:1-16, The Plot to Kill Jesus and The Anointing at Bethany
- (2) 26:17-35, The Passover with the Disciples
- (3) 26:57-68, Jesus before the High Priest
- (4) 27:3-10, The Suicide of Judas
- (5) 27:27-44, The Crucifixion of Jesus
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 27:57-61, The Burial of Jesus.

The readings are a semi-continuous series on Chapters 26 and 27, part of the passion narrative according to Matthew. I commented about reading and preaching on passages from the passion

narrative during Lent above in the introduction to the season of Lent. The discontinuities in this series are that the skipped verses were used in a similar series during Lent of Year Five, the Second Half-Year on Matthew.

Lent, Year Fourteen: Fourth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 21:37-38, The Days in Jerusalem
- (2) 6:43-45, A Tree and Its Fruit, A Test of Goodness
- (3) 13:1-9, Repent or Perish; The Barren Fig Tree
- (4) 15:11-32, Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother
- (5) 22:14-20, The Lord's Supper Instituted
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 21:5-8, 20, Jesus Predicts Destruction and Desolation

The reading for the First Sunday is a summary of the days spent in Jerusalem with which Luke concludes his apocalyptic section, 21:8-38. It is placed here to signal the beginning of the Lenten lead-in to the final crisis in Jerusalem.

The reading for the Second Sunday is recalled from the Sermon on the Plain and paired here with the reading for the Third Sunday for the common image of tree and fruit and the common theme of judgment based on performance, prompting a time of self assessment and the potential for reform.

The readings for the Third and Fourth Sundays follow closely the *RCL* Year C, and continue the themes of sin, judgment, repentance, restoration, and renewed life.

The reading for the Fifth Sunday is a variance from the *RCL* Year C, which has a reading from the Gospel of John rather than Luke. The *RCL* Year C includes Luke 22:14-20, The Institution

of the Lord's Supper, in the Liturgy of the Passion, first option, a reading or portrayal of the entire passion account of Luke on Passion/Palm Sunday.

The Passion/Palm Sunday lection, Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple and the desolation of Jerusalem, may be discussed as having a dual reference: to the building and the city which were destroyed forty years after Jesus' death and, emblematically, to his own approaching death and the temporary dispersal of his followers. Such a dual interpretation may be suggested by John 2:21.

Lent, Year Fifteen: Fifth Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) 4:1-11, The Temptation of Jesus
- (2) 20:17-19, A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- (3) 19:16-22, The Rich Young Man
- (4) 19:23-30, Riches and the Kingdom of Heaven
- (5) 16:5-12, The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 21:1-11, Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

The reading for the first Sunday is the same as in the *RCL* Year A.

The reading for the second Sunday is the final one of the three predictions by Jesus of his climactic ordeal and victory at Jerusalem. The previous two predictions are at Epiphany 2 and 6 of this year. The rationale for this arrangement is given in the next to last paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter.

The readings for Sundays 3 and 4 are a continuous pair on teachings of Jesus about riches that can contribute to the Lenten call for self-review, self-denial, and personal sacrifice in the

priorities of material life.

The reading for the Fifth Sunday is Jesus' warning about the infectious influence of the teachings (yeast) of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday is the one that the *RCL* Year A has for the "Liturgy of the Palms." Readings from the Passion are used on Passion/Palm Sunday in other years of this lectionary.

Lent, Year Sixteen: Fifth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) 4:1-13, The Temptation of Jesus
- (2) 7:1-10, Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant
- (3) 7:11-17, Jesus Raises a Widow's Son at Nain
- (4) 7:18-35, Messengers from John the Baptist
- (5) 7:36-50, A Sinful Woman Forgiveness
- (6) (Passion/Palm) 19:41-48, Jesus Weeps for Jerusalem & Cleanses the Temple

The reading for the First Sunday is the same as in the *RCL* Year C.

The readings for Sundays two to five comprise a continuous series from 7:1-50 and include sign-events of healing, resurrection and forgiveness, and messages exchanged between John the Baptist and Jesus about signs of the coming messianic kingdom.

The reading for Passion/Palm Sunday is 19:41-48, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, predicts the city's ultimate destruction, and expels the bankers and merchants from the Temple precincts. The interposition of the weeping over Jerusalem and prediction of its destruction between the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple is unique to Luke's Gospel.

5. Season of Easter and Pentecost Sunday

In some years, the readings for the six Sundays between Easter and Pentecost, Second to Seventh Sundays of Easter Season, include some of the appearances of the risen Christ on Easter day and the days following. In the years on the Gospel of John, some of the traditional post Easter readings such as the shepherd passages in Chapter Ten are used. In other years, the readings are semi-continuous courses of the teachings and actions of Jesus during his public ministry, a time for disciples to remember and reflect on those teachings and actions in the light of his subsequent death and resurrection. Buttrick 1988, 57 and n. 1 of Chapter 5, p. 91, discusses and cites works on the theological method of beginning a study of Jesus' life and work with a look back from and through the event of his resurrection. Buttrick 1992 is organized as follows: Part I on the Resurrection and Part II on the Passion, an ordering that is explained in the Prologue of the book and at various places throughout the book. Including on p. 110 a discussion of the genre of the Gospels. Borg 1999, 53-76, suggests that the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John present pictures of Jesus' life and ministry as seen by their communities of faith from a post Easter perspective while Mark is more reliable as a picture of Jesus as seen prior to his death and resurrection, even though it too took its present form long after Jesus' death and resurrection. Koester 1990, 22-25, discusses the dynamic relationships of the historical contexts of textual formation and of the Gospel narrative settings as well as the relationships of liturgical/seasonal settings and historical/theological perspectives.

This lectionary has suggested paired readings from the Old Testament for the Sundays of Easter just as it does for all the other seasons. The three-year lectionaries have First Readings from Acts in lieu of Old Testament readings during Easter Season. I comment on this in n. 4 [¶ 3].

This lectionary does not provide readings specifically selected for Ascension Day or for the

ascension theme on the Sunday following Ascension Day. As far as exposition in preaching is concerned, the account in Acts 1:3 could be taken up on the Sunday before Pentecost in the year when one chooses to begin a summer series on the Book of Acts. The mention of Jesus' ascension in the longer ending of Mark, 16:9-20, is included in the reading for Easter Day of Year Ten, Third Half-Year on Mark. The mention of Jesus' ascension in Luke 24:51 is included in the reading for the Day of Pentecost in Year Eleven, Third Half-Year on Luke. As far as concerns an annual observance on Ascension Day or the ascension theme on the Sunday following Ascension Day, the three-year lectionaries provide readings that may be used. If the principal reading on the Sunday following Ascension Day is not an ascension account, the theme of ascension may still be included in the worship service with an introductory rite including appropriate Scripture verses and with hymns and prayers throughout the service

The account of the Day of Pentecost in Chapter Two of the Book of Acts may be divided and used as the principal readings for exposition in the sermons on Pentecost Sunday and following Sundays in a year when a continuous series on the Book of Acts is planned for the summer quarter in the Season after Pentecost (Ordinary Time). For other years, this lectionary provides for Pentecost Sunday a principal reading from the Gospel of the year, a reading that mentions or alludes to the work of the Holy Spirit. At those times, some portion of the account in Chapter 2 of Acts might be adapted for an introductory rite at the beginning of the service, perhaps an extended scriptural call to worship and maybe with some kind of symbolic liturgical action, much as the procession with Palms and the Jerusalem entry texts are used as an entry rite on Passion/Palm Sunday when the principal Gospel reading is to be from the passion rather than the triumphal entry.

Easter, Year One: First Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 28:1-10, The Resurrection of Jesus
- (2) 18:1-4, True Greatness
- (3) 18:5-9, Temptations to Sin
- (4) 18:10-14, The Parable of the Lost Sheep
- (5) 18:15-17, Reproving Another Who Sins
- (6) 18:21-22, Forgiveness
- (7) 18:23-35, The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Pentecost Sunday: 18:18-20, Christ's Presence in the Fellowship

The reading for Easter Sunday is the same as the secondary option in the *RCL* Year A. The primary option in the *RCL* is from the Gospel of John. The post resurrection appearances of Jesus are scheduled in this lectionary for selected Sundays of Easter Season in Years One, Three, Four, Eight, Ten, and Sixteen, including Easter Day of Years One, Three, Eight, Ten, and Sixteen. There is also a resurrection appearance in the reading for Pentecost Sunday of Year Fourteen.

The readings for the second Sunday of Easter Season to Pentecost Sunday are a semi-continuous series on forgiveness and reconciliation in the Christian Community in Matthew 18:1-35. The only discontinuity is that Verses 18-20, Christ's Presence in the Fellowship, are out of sequence, assigned to Pentecost Sunday. Just as the weeks between Easter and Pentecost were a time when the first disciples might have remembered and reflected on the teachings of Jesus during his incarnate time with them in the light of his recent death and resurrection, so this series on Jesus' teachings at the end of the Galilean Section of Matthew's Gospel can prompt a time of reflection on Jesus' teachings in the light of the Easter event for disciples today. The *RCL* Year A, the nominal year on Mattheew, has readings from John and Luke rather than Matthew at this season.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is part of the semi-continuous series on 18:1-35 scheduled for the Sundays following Easter of this year. The passage does not mention the Holy Spirit as such, but it would be strange to preach on these verses without mentioning the Holy Spirit and the revelation at Pentecost as an essential key to understanding and experiencing the presence of the risen and glorified Christ in the fellowship of the church. The *RCL* Year A has a reading from John rather than Matthew.

Easter, Year Two: First Half-Year on MARK

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 12:18-27, The Question about the Resurrection
- (2) 14:26-42, Peter's Denial Foretold; Jesus Prays in Gethsemane
- (3) 14:43-52, The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
- (4) 14:53-65, Jesus before the Council
- (5) 14: (26-31, 53-54) 66-72, Peter Denies Jesus
- (6) 15:1-20, Jesus Before Pilate; The Soldiers Mock Jesus
- (7) 15:21-47, The Crucifixion, Death and Burial of Jesus

Pentecost Sunday: 1:7-8, He Will Baptize with the Holy Spirit

The reading for Easter Sunday is Mark's version of Jesus' answer to the provocative question by the Sadducees about the resurrection and successive or serial marriage partners. This passage is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*. Neither is the parallel passage in Matthew 22:23-33. The parallel in Luke 20:27-38 is scheduled for early November in the *RCL*, Year C.

The readings for the second to seventh Sundays are a continuous series on 14:26 – 15:47, a continuation of the series on selections from the passion narrative begun in the first to fifth Sundays

of Lent in this year. The Sundays following Easter are treated here as a time for disciples to remember and reflect on the events of the week of his passion in the light of his death and resurrection. Buttrick 1988 and 1992, as referenced above in the general introduction to the Season of Easter, especially the Prologue in 1992, discusses the importance of seeing the passion from the perspective of the resurrection event. The verses in parentheses at the Fifth Sunday are from the selections of the Second and Fourth Sundays and may be reread here to complete the setting and narrative of Peter's denial of Jesus.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is a portion of the passage (1:6-8) scheduled for the third Sunday of Advent in Year Ten of this lectionary. It is also a portion of the passage (1:4-11) scheduled for Baptism of the Lord (First Sunday after the Epiphany) in Year B of the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Three: First Half-Year on LUKE

(1) **Easter Sunday:** 24:36-43, Jesus Appears to His Disciples

(2) 16:14-18, The Law and Kingdom of God

(3) 17:1-10, Some Sayings of Jesus

(4) 17:11-19, Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

(5) 17:20-21, The Coming of the Kingdom

(6) 18:1-8, The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge

(7) 18:9-14, The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Pentecost Sunday: 12:2-12, Bravely Trust and Obey the Holy Spirit

The reading for Easter Sunday is a selection from one of the resurrection appearances in the Lucan narrative. It is a portion of the reading that the *RCL* schedules for the third Sunday of Easter in Year

C, the Year on Luke.

The readings for the second to seventh Sundays are a semi-continuous series on 16:14 – 18:1, some of the later chapters of Luke’s Special Section (Throckmorton 1992). Here as in Year One the Sundays of Easter Season are a time for Christians to reflect on some of the teachings and actions of Jesus during his public ministry in light of his subsequent death and resurrection. The discontinuities are: 16:19-31, The Rich Man and Lazarus, is reserved for use on the seventh Sunday of Easter of Year Fourteen in a series of parables from Luke’s Special Section; 17:22-27, The Last Days of the Son of Man, and 17:28-37, The Suddenness of the Final Day, are omitted here because reserved for the first and second Sundays of Advent in Year Eleven.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is a passage that is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Four: First Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 20:1-10, The Resurrection of Jesus
- (2) 20:19-31, Jesus Appears to the Disciples
- (3) 10:1-10, Jesus the Gate of the Sheepfold
- (4) 17:1-5, Jesus Prays for Glorification
- (5) 17:6-19, Jesus Prays for His Disciples
- (6) 17:20-26, Jesus Prays for All the World for All Time
- (7) 13:36 – 14:4, Discipleship

Pentecost Sunday: 14:15-17, Promise of Another Helper

The reading for Easter Sunday is a portion of the passage, 20:1-18, that the *RCL* schedules for Easter

Sunday in Years A, B, and C. This lectionary reserves 20:11-18 “Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene” for Easter Sunday of Year 8, the second half-year on John.

The reading for the second Sunday is a passage that the *RCL* schedules for the second Sunday of Easter in Years A, B, and C. The *RCL* also schedules 20:19-23 as an alternate reading for Pentecost Sunday in Year A, the year on Matthew.

The reading for the third Sunday is a passage that the *RCL* schedules for the fourth Sunday of Easter in Year A.

The readings for the fourth to sixth Sundays are a continuous reading of 17:1-26. The *RCL* divides part of this section up among the three years as follows: 17:1-11 as an alternate reading for the seventh Sunday of Easter in Year A, 17:6-19 for the seventh Sunday of Easter in Year B and 17:20-26 for the seventh Sunday of Easter in Year C.

The reading for the seventh Sunday is a passage which is not scheduled for any time in the *RCL*.

The reading for Pentecost is an excerpt from the overlapping passages that the *RCL* assigns to Pentecost Sunday of Year C (14:8-17) and the sixth Sunday of Easter in Year A (14:15-21).

Easter, Year Five: Second Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 27:62-66, The Guard at the Tomb
- (2) 9:18-26, A Girl Restored and a Woman Healed
- (3) 21:12-17, Jesus Cleanses the Temple
- (4) 21:18-22, Jesus Curses the Fig Tree
- (5) 21:33-46, The Parable of the Wicked Tenants
- (6) 22:15-22, The Question about Taxes

(7) 23:37-39, The Lament over Jerusalem

Pentecost Sunday: 28:16-28, The Commissioning of the Disciples

The reading for Easter Sunday exposes a preemptive defense against a suspected plot on the part of Jesus' disciples to steal and hide his body and make a deceptive claim of his resurrection, and reflects confusion about the faith mystery and reality of Christ's resurrection that has persisted through history. The preacher is called to proclaim and celebrate the faith mystery and reality of the resurrection. She may help to clarify some people's confusion about what the resurrection faith is, but will be frustrated or self-deceived if she tries to prove the event of the resurrection as a scientific or historical fact.

Here again the Sundays following Easter are taken as a time for Christians to remember and reflect on some of the sayings and actions of Jesus in the light of his subsequent suffering, death, resurrection, and life in glory. The post Easter reflections begin on the second Sunday of Easter with the reading of two entwined mighty works of Jesus that can be seen as signs pointing to the promise of universal healing and new life that is fulfilled in the Easter events.

The readings for the third to seventh Sundays are a semi-continuous series on episodes in the Judean ministry, signs and teachings leading toward the final resolution of Jesus' time in the flesh. The discontinuities, i.e., the skipped verses, are: 21:23-27, Jesus' Authority Questioned, which is reserved for Year Fifteen, Advent 3; 21:28-32, The Parable of the Two Sons, is reserved for Year Fifteen, Christmas 2; 22:1-14, The Parable of the Wedding Banquet, which was used at Advent 4 of this Year (Five); 22:23-33, The Question about the Resurrection, which is reserved for Year Fifteen, Easter Sunday; 22:34-40, The Greatest Commandment, which is reserved for Year Fifteen, Pentecost Sunday; 22:41-46, The Question about David's Son, which is reserved for Year Thirteen,

Advent 4; 23:1-36, Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees, which is subdivided and reserved for Year Fifteen, Easter 2-7.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday includes the promise of Christ's companionship in the Spirit always, to the close of the age.

Easter, Year Six: Second Half-Year on MARK

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 16:1-8, The Resurrection of Jesus
- (2) 4:1-9, The Parable of the Sower
- (3) 4:10-12, The Purpose of the Parables
- (4) 4:13-20, Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower
- (5) 4:21-25, A Lamp under a Bushel Basket
- (6) 4:26-29, The Parable of the Growing Seed
- (7) 4:30-34, The Parable of the Mustard Seed; The Use of Parables

Pentecost Sunday: 13:9-13, Not You Who Speak, but the Holy Spirit

The reading for Easter Sunday is the same as the second option in the *RCL*, Year B, the first option being from the gospel of John. Buttrick 1992, 66-68 discusses the “preachableness” of this shorter ending of Mark.

The readings for the Second to the Seventh Sundays of Easter constitute a continuous series on Jesus' teaching in the parable section of Mark 4:1-34. This is a variance from the *RCL* Year B which has readings from John and Luke at this season in the “Markan Year.” Here again, as in Year One, the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost are treated as a time when disciples might remember and reflect on some of the teachings of Jesus during his Galilean ministry in the light of

his subsequent death and resurrection.

In the reading for Pentecost Sunday, Jesus assures his disciples of the help of the Holy Spirit when they are put on trial for their Christian faith. This is a variance from the *RCL* Year B which has a reading from John rather than Mark. Mark 13:9-13 is not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Seven: Second Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 19:1-10, Jesus and Zacchaeus
- (2) 19:11-27, The Parable of the Ten Pounds
- (3) 20:45-47, Jesus Denounces the Scribes
- (4) 14:1-6, Jesus Heals the Man with Dropsy
- (5) 14:7-14, Humility and Hospitality
- (6) 18:18-30, The Rich Ruler
- (7) 18:35-43, Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar Near Jericho

Pentecost Sunday: 10:21-22, Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit

Christian worshipers expect to encounter the risen Christ on Easter Sunday, and the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus as Jesus entered Jericho on his way to the final crisis in Jerusalem is not the first Easter text that comes to one's mind. But Christian worshipers expect to encounter the risen Christ on *every* Sunday as they gather in fellowship to hear the gospel proclaimed from the Word of God and to break bread at the Lord's Table. The reading and preaching of the Zacchaeus text on Easter Sunday provides a good opportunity to be reminded of and to lift up the fact that every Sunday is a resurrection day for believers, and that we expect to have table fellowship with the

risen Christ any time that we attend to the life and work of Jesus and break bread at the Lord's Table, and not just when we are staring into the empty tomb or studying one of the resurrection appearances to the first disciples during those first forty days. After all, most of those resurrection appearances took place in connection with a meal and with a discussion among the disciples about their experiences with Jesus during his public ministry. The Zacchaeus episode presents a moving picture of how dramatically our lives can be transformed when we seek to see Jesus more clearly and when the risen Christ obliges by coming into our homes for table fellowship. The risen Christ invites us to come down out of our sycamore trees and come away from his empty tomb and share our homes and tables with him just as he shares his with us in the gathered faith community on Easter Sunday and on every Sunday. The preacher might keep on studying the Zacchaeus text with the help of several of the best available scholarly commentaries on Luke until she surprises herself and the congregation by preaching from this passage one of her best Easter sermons ever. Thoughtful worship planners should see to it that the music, prayers, and liturgical texts in other parts of the worship service include the more familiar and expected Easter Sunday fare.

The Sundays of this Easter season are devoted to a collection of teachings and encounters from the Judean section of Jesus' ministry and from Luke's Special Section (Throckmorton 1992), including a connected pair on the first and second Sundays and a connected pair on the fourth and fifth Sundays, all of which are especially instructive of what it means to live a new life when these teachings and encounters are proclaimed in the light of Jesus' subsequent death, resurrection and continuing presence in the fellowship of the Spirit.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is a passage in Luke's Special Section (Throckmorton 1992) that is not appointed for any Sunday in the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Eight: Second Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 20:11-18, Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene
- (2) 21:1-14, Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples
- (3) 21:15-23, Jesus and Peter and the Beloved Disciple
- (4) 10:11-18, Good Shepherd and Hired Hand
- (5) 13:31-35, The New Commandment
- (6) 15:1-8, Jesus the True Vine
- (7) 15:9-17, Jesus the True Friend

Pentecost Sunday: 14:25-26, The Promise of the Holy Spirit

The reading for Easter Sunday is a portion of the reading, 20:1-18, that the *RCL* has as an alternate reading for Easter of Years A, B, and C.

The readings for the second and third Sundays are a continuous pair on the appearance of the risen Lord to seven disciples including a great catch of fish and breakfast on the beach and the pastoral commission of Peter and the discussion between Jesus and Peter about the disciple whom Jesus loved.

The readings for the fourth to Pentecost Sundays recall some of the teachings of Jesus at the final supper with the disciples recorded in Chapters 13-17 of John. They are placed here for proclamation in the light of the Easter events. The reading for the fourth Sunday is a passage which is scheduled for the corresponding Sunday in Year B, the nominal year on Mark, of the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Nine: Third Half-Year on MATTHEW

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 12:43-45, Return of the Unclean Spirit

- (2) 13:1-9, 18-23, The Parable of the Sower
- (3) 13:10-15, 34-36a, The Purpose of the Parables
- (4) 13:24-30, 36b-43, 47-50, Weeds, Explanation, Net
- (5) 13:31-33, The Parables of the Mustard Seed & the Yeast
- (6) 13:44-46, The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl
- (7) 13:51-53, Treasures New and Old

Pentecost Sunday: 12:31-32, Blasphemy against the Spirit

The readings for Easter to Pentecost recall some of Jesus' parabolic teachings during his Galilean ministry. They are scheduled here for proclamation in the light of his subsequent death and resurrection.

The reading for Easter Sunday is continuous with the reading of the previous Sunday, the Palm/Passion Sunday reading of Matthew 12:38-42, The Sign of Jonah. What does The Return of the Unclean Spirit have to do with Easter Sunday? Part of Jesus' controversy with the Scribes and Pharisees was the distortion of the covenant relationship between God and the people in which atonement meant the sacrificial lamb and the scapegoat paid the price for the people's sin and carried their sin into the wilderness, after which it was up to the people to live in renewed and complete obedience to the ritual and moral laws in every detail. But this approach became distorted so that the first and summary laws of loving relationships with God and neighbor were forgotten and violated, often in the very effort to obey the letter of the ritual and moral laws, paying a tithe of every little thing while neglecting the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith. Atonement and new life tended to collapse, *like people that have unclean spirits expelled only to have their lives invaded by seven other evil spirits*. Clearly the Easter atonement of the Christian faith is better able

to cope with this ever-present relapse syndrome since Christ is not only the substitute sacrifice for our sins, but also takes us with him into his death and resurrection through the sign of baptism (Romans 6:1-14) and gives us New Life with Holy Spirit and Christian Fellowship and Word of Scripture and Baptism and Lord's Supper and Great Commission to Make Disciples and Call to Stand and Deliver for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation, so that our Renewed Love Relationship with God and Neighbor can be continually restored and maintained through Prayer and Study, Fasting and Fellowship, Mutual Caring and Outreaching Mission, and Doing Justice in the World. Have Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Reformed, and Pentecostal Christianity, from time to time, fallen into the same abuse and distortion as the Scribes and Pharisees by emphasizing the substitution aspect of our Easter Day of Atonement to the neglect of other dimensions, perspectives, and aspects of our atonement in Christ? Are we Easter-Day-of-Atonement Christians sometimes *like people that have unclean spirits expelled only to have our lives invaded by seven other evil spirits*? Let the preacher preach on, and let her be windy like the Spirit, but not with such long sentences as the fifth one in this paragraph.

The readings for the first to seventh Sundays of Easter are a semi-continuous series on 12:43 – 13:53, a section heavy with parables and their purpose and interpretation. The discontinuities are the omission of 12:46-50, The True Kindred of Jesus, which is scheduled for the first Sunday of Christmas in Year Thirteen; and the rearrangement of verses to put parable interpretations with the corresponding parables and to bring together verses on the purpose of speaking in parables.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday was reserved for this day from the series during Lent of this year. The parallel passage in Mark is scheduled for Pentecost Sunday of Year 10. I have commented on this exceptional scheduling of parallels in successive years in the final paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter.

Easter, Year Ten: Third Half-Year on MARK

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 16:9-20, The Longer Ending of Mark
- (2) 9:38-41, Another Exorcist
- (3) 9:42-50, Temptations to Sin
- (4) 10:17-31, The Rich Man
- (5) 10:46-52, The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus
- (6) 12:38-40, Jesus Denounces the Scribes
- (7) 12:41-44, The Widow's Offering

Pentecost Sunday: 3:28-30, Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit.

The reading for Easter Sunday includes three resurrection appearances of Jesus to followers, the final commissioning of the disciples, and the ascension of Jesus to heaven. These verses, Mark 16:9-20, “The Longer Ending of Mark,” do not appear in some of the most ancient authorities (manuscripts), according to a footnote in the New Revised Standard Version. The part about the apostolic signs of snake handling and drinking poison unharmed, verse 18, appears nowhere else in the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ final commissioning and empowering of the disciples. This section of Mark, 16:9-20, is not scheduled for any Sunday in the RCL. If a preacher can comment constructively on Verse 18 in an Easter sermon that joyfully celebrates the new being that is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, she is a disciple of strong and perceptive faith, but I do not recommend that she handle venomous serpents or drink the poisoned Kool Aid. I comment on another passage that is textually questioned, John 7:53 – 8:11, “The Woman Caught in Adultery,” at Baptism/Epiphany, Year Eight, Eighth Sunday, in this chapter.

The readings for the second to seventh Sundays of Easter are a selection of Jesus' teachings and a healing in the ninth, tenth, and twelfth chapters of Mark, including continuous pairs in the ninth and twelfth chapters. Here is another Easter season for disciples to reflect on encounters and teachings toward the end of Jesus' ministry from the perspective of his subsequent death and resurrection. The two readings from Chapter Nine are from the latter part of the Galilean ministry, the two from Chapter Ten from the time of the journey to Jerusalem, and the two from Chapter Twelve from the days in Jerusalem (Throckmorton 1992).

The reading for Pentecost Sunday was reserved for this day from the series during the Season after Epiphany of this year. The parallel passage in Matthew is scheduled for Pentecost Sunday in Year 9. I comment on this exceptional scheduling of parallels in successive years in the last paragraph of the Preliminary Remarks section of this chapter.

Easter, Year Eleven: Third Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 20:27-40, The Question about the Resurrection
- (2) 6:46-49, Hearers and Doers of the Word - The Two Foundations
- (3) 20:9-19, The Parable of the Wicked Tenants
- (4) 20:20-26, The Question about Paying Taxes
- (5) 21:1-4, The Widow's Offering
- (6) 22:24-30, The Dispute about Greatness
- (7) 22:35-38, Purse, Bag, Sword

Pentecost Sunday: 24:50-53, The Ascension of Jesus

The reading for Easter Sunday is Luke's version of Jesus' answer to the provocative question by the

Sadducees about the resurrection and successive or serial marriage partners. This passage is scheduled for early November in the *RCL*. The parallels in Mark and Matthew are not scheduled for any Sunday in the *RCL*. I have further comment under Easter Sunday of Year Two.

Once again, the Sundays following Easter Sunday are taken as a time for Christians to proclaim the gospel of Jesus' teachings in the light of his subsequent death and resurrection.

The reading for the second Sunday is recalled from the sermon on the plain, early in the Galilean phase of Jesus' ministry.

The readings for the third to seventh Sundays are selected from Jesus' conversations with his disciples that took place during the time of his ministry in the environs of Jerusalem, leading up to his death and resurrection.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is part of the longer passage, 24:44-53, scheduled for Ascension Sunday, a week before Pentecost, in all three years of the *RCL*, the first part of which, 24:44-49, is assigned to Pentecost Sunday in Year Fourteen of this lectionary, a passage in which Jesus reiterated the promise of the Father to send the "power from on High." I discussed the remembrance of the ascension on Ascension Day or the Sunday following Ascension Day above in the third paragraph of the introduction to this Easter section.

Easter, Year Twelve: Third Half-Year on JOHN

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 11:1-44, The Resurrection and the Life
- (2) 14:5-14, Jesus the Way to the Father
- (3) 14:18-24, The Promise of the Holy Spirit
- (4) 14:27-31, My Peace I Give to You
- (5) 15:28-25, The World's Hatred

(6) 15:26 – 16:4a, Disciples’ Task and World’s Hatred²⁰ (Verses 26-27 also used on Pentecost Sunday below)

(7) 16:25-33, Peace for the Disciples

Pentecost Sunday: 15:26-27, 16:4b-15, The Work of the Spirit

The reading for Easter Sunday includes the death of Lazarus, Jesus’ conversation with Martha about death, resurrection, and life, and the raising of Lazarus by Jesus. It is the passage that the *RCL* schedules for the 5th Sunday of Lent in Year A, the nominal year on Matthew. The *RCL* also schedules a portion of this passage (11:32-44) for All Saints Day (November 1) or for the First Sunday in November in Year B, the year on Mark.

The readings for the second Sunday of Easter to Pentecost Sunday are a semi-continuous series on selections from chapters 14, 15, and 16 of John. Some of the skipped verses were used in previous years as follows: 14:1-4: Year 4, Easter 7; 14:15-17: Year 4, Pentecost Sunday; 14:25-26: Year 8, Pentecost Sunday; 15:1-8: Year 8, Easter 6; 15:9-17: Year 8, Easter 7; 16:16-24: Year 8, Advent 1. The pericope and heading at the sixth Sunday are from Bultmann 1971, 551-557. Here, 16:4b-15 is deferred to Pentecost Sunday of this year where it is paired with a repeat reading of 15:26-27 which is included in the reading for the sixth Sunday here.²⁰

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is the same as in Year B (Mark) of the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Thirteen: Fourth Half-Year on MATTHEW

(1) **Easter Sunday:** 28:11-15, The Report of the Guard

(2) 6:19-23, Concerning Treasures; The Sound Eye

(3) 7:1-6, Judging Others

- (4) 7:7-12, Ask, Search, Knock; The Golden Rule
- (5) 7:13-23, The Difficult Way of Discipleship
- (6) 7:24-27, Hearers and Doers
- (7) 7:28-29, As One Having Authority

Pentecost Sunday: 3:11-12, Baptism with Spirit and Fire

The reading for Easter Sunday includes a plot by the chief priests to implicate the guards in framing the disciples for stealing the body of Jesus, an anti-resurrection conspiracy theory that persists into the Twenty-first Century.

The readings for the Second to Seventh Sundays of Easter are a semi-continuous series on the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 6:10 – 7:29. The discontinuity is that 6:24-34 is omitted here. It is used on the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany in Year Fifteen, the fifth half-year on Matthew.

The two verses in the reading for Pentecost Sunday are also included in the longer passage scheduled for the second Sunday of Advent in Year 1 of this lectionary and for the second Sunday of Advent in Year A of the *RCL*.

Easter, Year Fourteen: Fourth Half-Year on LUKE

- (1) **Easter Sunday:** 24:1-12, The Resurrection of Jesus
- (2) 12:13-21, The Parable of the Rich Fool
- (3) 13:18-21, Two Parables: The Mustard Seed, The Yeast
- (4) 14:15-24, The Parable of the Great Dinner
- (5) 15:1-10, Two Parables: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin
- (6) 16:1-13, The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

(7) 16:19-31, The Rich Man and Lazarus

Pentecost Sunday: 24:44-49, Power from on High

The reading for Easter Day is the same as the second option in the *RCL* Year C. The first option in the *RCL* is from the gospel of John rather than Luke.

The readings for Sundays Two through Seven are eight parables, including two pairs, selected from Chapters 12-16 in Luke's Special Section. Once again, the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost are treated as a time when disciples might remember and reflect on some of the events, teachings and works of Jesus' public ministry in the light of his subsequent death and resurrection. The readings for these Sundays in the *RCL* Year C are from John rather than Luke. Five of the parables scheduled here are scheduled in the *RCL* Year C in July – August. The other three are not scheduled in the *RCL* at all.

In the Pentecost reading, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples gathered in Jerusalem and instructs them to remain in the city until they have been clothed with power from on high. This is a variance from the *RCL* Year C which has a reading from John rather than Luke. The *RCL* includes most of Luke 24:44-49 in the reading (36b-48) for the third Sunday of Easter, Year B.

Easter, Year Fifteen: Fifth Half-Year on MATTHEW

(1) **Easter Sunday:** 22:23-33, The Question about the Resurrection.

(2) 23:1-12, Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees

(3) 23:13-15, We Lose, You Lose

(4) 23:16-22, Woe to You Blind Guides, Fools

(5) 23:23-24, The Weightier Matters of the Law

(6) 23:25-28, Clean on the Outside, Dirty on the Inside

(7) 23:29-36, Go Ahead, Kill My Messengers

Pentecost Sunday: 22:34-40, The Great Commandment

The reading for Easter Sunday is Matthew's version of Jesus' answer to the provocative question by the Sadducees about the resurrection and successive or serial marriage partners. I commented under Easter Sunday of Year Two on the Markan parallel and under Easter Sunday of Year Eleven on Luke's account.

Once again, the Sundays of Easter Season are a time when the church can reflect on some of Jesus' teachings and incarnate life encounters in the light of the recent celebration of his resurrection. The readings for the second to seventh Sundays are a continuous series on 23:1-36, in which Jesus acknowledges that the *teachings* of the scribes and the Pharisees are true to the tradition of Moses and then uses many images to characterize and denounce their *practices*.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday invites the preacher to suggest a connection between the gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the actualization of all the law and the prophets in the love of God and neighbor. Later Judaism added to the meaning of Pentecost, a secondary harvest festival celebrated fifty days after Passover, by making it commemorative of the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Sinai, according to *Harper's Bible Dictionary* under "Pentecost."

Easter, Year Sixteen: Fifth Half-Year on LUKE

(1) **Easter Sunday:** 24:13-35, The Walk to Emmaus

(2) 9:51-62, Samaritan Village Rejects Jesus; Would-Be Followers of Jesus

(3) 10:1-20, The Mission of the Seventy

- (4)
- (5) 10:23-24, Blessedness of Disciples
- (6) 10:25-37, The Parable of the Good Samaritan
- (7) 10:38-42, Jesus Visits Martha and Mary
- (8) 11:1-8, The Lord's Prayer, Perseverance in Prayer

Pentecost Sunday: 11:9-13, The Holy Spirit is Available for the Asking

The reading for Easter Sunday is 24:13-35, The Walk to Emmaus. This is a passage that the *RCL* uses on the third Sunday of Easter in Year A, the year on Matthew! It is also scheduled for Easter Evening in Years A, B, and C of the *RCL*.

The readings for the second Sunday of Easter to Pentecost Sunday are a semi-continuous series on 9:51 – 11:13. The only discontinuity is the omission of 10:21-22, Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, which is used on Pentecost Sunday of Year Seven. Note that 11:1-4, the Lord's Prayer according to Luke, was presented in Lent of Year Seven with a Sunday devoted to each petition. Here, on the seventh Sunday, Luke's presentation of the prayer is treated in whole as set before Jesus' parable about perseverance in prayer, verses 5-8.

The reading for Pentecost Sunday is continuous with the preceding Sundays in the Season of Easter. A longer passage, 11:1-13, is scheduled for the Sunday between July 24 and 30 in Year C of the *RCL*.

6. Season after Pentecost (Ordinary Time)

Continue on the Gospel of the year as many Sundays as necessary to use any of the passages listed for Sundays 4-8 of the Season after Epiphany (Ordinary Time) if they were not used due to a

shortage of Sundays. Sunday 9, The Last Sunday of the Season after Epiphany (Ordinary Time), should always be used on the Sunday before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. The remaining Sundays of the Season after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) could be used through August to begin or resume a series on an Epistle, Acts, or Revelation; and September to Advent could be used to begin or resume a series on a book of the Old Testament.

This lectionary does not provide texts selected specifically for Trinity Sunday (next after Pentecost) or for All Saints (November 1 or the First Sunday in November) or for Reign of Christ the King (Sunday between November 20 and November 26 inclusive). Texts for the annual observance of these days may be found in the three-year lectionaries, in some cases the same texts for years A, B, and C, as well as in older one-year and two-year lectionaries. Some churches that use this lectionary may wish to substitute those traditional texts annually on one or more of these feast days, while simply delaying their continuous course on an Epistle or Old Testament book one week for each feast day observed. Others might wish to use the traditional feast day texts as liturgical readings but not for exposition in preaching every year, while using the next reading in a summer series on an Epistle or fall series on an Old Testament book as the basis for preaching. Still others might observe the feast with an introductory rite based on the traditional lections and with hymns and prayers that honor the day, while the sermon honors their continuous summer series on an epistle or their fall series from the Old Testament. Perhaps just as important as how a church recognizes or not the feast is that the preacher continue to study the Church's historic teaching on the meaning of the Trinity, the Communion of All the Saints in all the World in all the Ages, and the Reign of Christ the King so that she (or he) may recognize when the Scripture of the day at whatever time of year calls her and gives her opportunity to let that Scripture shine on that doctrine and let the light of that teaching shine on that text, and to let the interplay of those lights be a "laser light show"

in her preaching.

There are two instances in which this lectionary has assigned a particular text to Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost. They are in Years 10 and 12, the third and final years on the Gospels of Mark and John respectively. There was one passage remaining in each Gospel after all Sundays in three half-years had been assigned. The two orphans were assigned to the first Sunday after Pentecost in Years 10 and 12 respectively. They could be reassigned to the Sunday *after* Trinity if it is desired to use a traditional Trinity Sunday text on that day.

CHAPTER III

Liturgical Accompaniments and Optional Lections

a. Example Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Gospel Readings of Years One to Four

[¶1] Some worship communities are accustomed to incorporating themes from the Scripture readings in the composition and selection of some of the prayers, music, and other liturgical texts of the service. For example, Deiss 1976, 303-306 “The Whole Mass a Homily,” discusses the gospel proclamation value of basing the prayers and other liturgical texts of the service on one or more of the prescribed readings of the day. Bonhoeffer 1954, 47, wrote in his discussion of the Psalter that prayer in a Christian community “means praying according to the Word of God.” On the other hand, Skudlarek 1981, 102, rightly notes that the effort to unify the elements of the Lord's Day service around a controlling theme extracted from the principal lection of the day (always the Gospel lection in the 3-year lectionaries) can be overdone to the point of violating the basic nature of the service as an encounter with a person and an event rather than a "head trip" around a theme, which observation I have also cited in n. 19. The following are presented as *example* prayers because many worship planners and leaders will want to edit them or compose or select prayers more agreeable to their own prayer language, style and tradition, prayers that better express their own prayer response to their worship setting and times and the Gospel lections of the day. Others may prefer to use prayers from the treasury of historic liturgical

prayers without attention to the particular lections and themes of the day. Deiss 1992, 29, discusses the importance of composing new liturgical prayers rather than using or translating classic prayers, especially those in a dead language. However, worship leaders are welcome to use these prayers verbatim or adapted in worship service handouts and screen projections with or without attribution. Worship planners will be on their own and will use other resources in years 5 to 16 since example prayers are provided here only for years 1 to 4.

[¶2] Three prayers are provided for each Sunday—Opening Prayer, Confession of Sin and Brokenness, and Prayer of Thanks. The opening prayers have been influenced in form by the opening prayers or collects of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions, the prayers of adoration and the prayers for illumination of the Calvinist/Zwinglian/Reforming tradition, and the prayers of invocation of the general Protestant tradition. The structure of the collect and its placement in the mass are discussed in Skudlarek 1981, 86, Deiss 1992, 28, and *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [1975] Articles 10 & 32 in Hoffman 1991, 51 & 55. Maxwell 1949, 176-179, discusses the structure, rhythm, and other qualities and characteristics of the collect, and how it is used. The opening prayer of adoration seen in some earlier worship books of the Calvinist/Zwinglian/Reforming tradition are similar in form to the classic structure of prayer in Jewish worship, i.e., the blessing in which the exhortation to praise God is reiterated and enlarged, and in which some of God's saving actions in history as witnessed in scripture may be recited. Karl Barth's opening prayer seen in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 115, is an exquisitely beautiful and apparently heartfelt prayer that is a good example of a Protestant invocation that also has mainly the structure of the collect. Old 1995, 139-174, holds that the prayer for illumination is properly given just before the principal Scripture reading. He sees traces of a prayer for illumination as early as Augustine and notes that its use disappeared or had mutated

into the collect of the day in the Roman mass by the Middle-Ages and was revived in the Reformation by the Calvinist and Zwinglian wings. Old, in a later writing, 1998a, 349-350, sees evidence of a prayer for illumination being regularly offered prior to the reading of scripture and the preaching in the third century by Origen in Alexandria and also in eucharistic liturgies in the early churches in Palestine. Ricoeur 1995, 269, notes that Augustine's *thought* is rightly characterized by the theme of illumination. Part of the theological/liturgical rationale of having a Prayer for Illumination before scripture reading and sermon is the concept that scripture has an inner spiritual meaning as well as an outer literal meaning, and that the Holy Spirit should be invoked to help make the scripture reading and preaching a spiritually transformative experience for the worshipping community. Old's 1998b, 255-268, discussion of Ephrem's doctrine of scripture and his Hymns on Paradise, and his, 444-454, report of the teaching of Pope Gregory the Great on the three-fold inspiration by the Holy Spirit—of the biblical writers, of the preacher, and of the hearer—by which God is revealed to the worshiper in the preached word, are instructive on the reason for a prayer for illumination. Allen and Springsted 2007, 28-29, report a medieval divide between theologians who follow Augustine's lead—divine illumination required for knowledge of God—and those who go with Aristotle's view that God is revealed in his evidence in sensible things.

[¶3] Another aspect of the meaning and importance of a prayer for illumination is seen in John Calvin's sermon on spiritual illumination, discussed in Old 2007, 253-258. Thompson 1971, 164, notes regarding Martin Bucer's liturgy of 1539 that "after the psalm, the minister offered the prayer for illumination, that God's holy Word might be truly heard 'with all diligence and faith,' and, 170-171, he indicates that Bucer's liturgy, "Psalter With Complete Church Practice," Strassburg, 1539, includes the rubric that "a short prayer for grace and a right spirit,

that the Sermon and Word of God which are to follow may be heard with profit” be offered by the minister before entering the pulpit to read “out of one of the Gospels as much as he proposes to expound in a single sermon, treating the book in succession,” that is, *lectio continua de scriptura*. There follows the text of such a prayer. Thompson, 198-199, 323, 340 n. 5, indicates that the same “order of proclamation: the prayer for illumination, followed by the lesson and the sermon” is prescribed in Calvin’s *The Form of Church Prayers* and in *The Middleburg Liturgy of the English Puritans*. Maxwell 1949, 114, has a chart showing the placement of the “Collect for Illumination” in three Reform liturgies of the Sixteenth Century. McArthur 1958, 24, notes that the prayer for illumination should be placed before the scripture reading as in the *Genevan Service Book* of 1556 rather than between the scripture reading and sermon as in the Church of Scotland’s *Book of Common Order* of 1940. On the other hand, Old 2007, 71, affirms as “good homiletic form” the offering of a prayer for illumination between the sermon introduction and the main body of the sermon, as done by Franz Volkmar Reinhard (1753-1812) in his sermon upon the feast of the Reformation in 1800, specifically an invocation of the presence and blessing of the Lord Jesus in the service of the hour, and in collect form! Here, I am not suggesting that an order of service should include a prayer for illumination just before the principal scripture reading or anywhere else, only noting that some of the opening prayers below have the form of a prayer for illumination. Kucharek’s 1971, 430, discussion suggests to me that the pre-Gospel prayer in the Eastern Orthodox churches may be more comparable to the Reforming tradition’s Prayer for Illumination than to the Roman Catholic tradition’s *Munda cor meum*, a personal prayer of the priest for worthily proclaiming (reading) the Gospel lection of the day. Examples of Prayers of Invocation in the Protestant tradition can be seen in Noyes 1934, 35-51, and Old 1995, 11-54.

[¶4] The Confession of Sin and Brokenness and the Prayer of Thanks are intended to be communal expressions read in unison by the whole congregation. Worship leaders and liturgiologists and congregants/parishioners, not to mention psychologists, have struggled for decades if not centuries with headings and prayer language connoting extreme personal guilt, wrongdoing, and total depravity in the corporate ritual of confession, which for many Protestant churches is a stand-in for the Roman Catholic individual confessional with a priest/confessor. Perhaps the very respectable, highly respected, and law-abiding Miss Dove, portrayed by Jennifer Jones in the 1955 movie *Good Morning Miss Dove* adapted from the book by Frances Gray Patton, was correct when on her death bed she told her Episcopalian priest that the General Confession in the *Book of Common Prayer* which he had just led her in reciting did not in any way represent or apply to the way she had lived her life:

Almighty God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
maker of all things, judge of all men:
We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins
and wickedness,
which we from time to time most grievously have committed,
by thought word, and deed, against thy divine Majesty,
provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us.
We do earnestly repent,
and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings;
the remembrance of them is grievous unto us,
the burden of them is intolerable.
Have mercy upon us,
have mercy upon us, most merciful Father;
for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
forgive us all that is past.
and grant that we may ever hereafter
serve and please thee in newness of life,
to the honor and glory of thy Name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Miss Dove, the ever-decorous veteran schoolteacher, prayed that prayer obediently with her confessor. But she was not buying it. Our sin of pride manifested as smug self-congratulation,

clings ever so closely and can easily go unnoticed by ourselves while being so plainly visible to others. Yet perhaps it was not the idea of sin but rather the language of sin that got under Miss Dove's skin. The reader/preacher/liturgiologist may be assisted in some measure by Borg's 2003, 167-171, discussion of the language of sin. Some will surely be inspired to use headings and prayer language other than those I have used in the example prayers of confession below.

[¶5] The brief prayers of thanks provided here are intended for that place in the service following the sermon where the money gifts are presented, possibly along with the gifts of bread and wine for the Eucharist. The presentation of the money and the communion elements together can be a signal reminder that the offering as a necessary and worshipful part of the people's service originated in the early church with the people who were able bringing food and drink from home to be placed on the common board or the altar/table to be shared in the common meal, the love feast, where no one is allowed to go away hungry, or to be shared in the ritual meal of Christ's body and blood, or in a combination of both kinds of New Testament thankful fellowship meal. I have appended (in parentheses) to each brief prayer of thanks an optional prayer of dedication of life and of offerings. This moment of corporate thanksgiving seems especially fitting in services where the Lord's Supper is not celebrated and therefore the eucharistic prayer—the great thanksgiving—is omitted. This is small compensation for the omission of the sacrament, but perhaps a brief corporate prayer of thanksgiving may at least remind some worshipers that the *sacrament* of thanksgiving is missing from the service. I have discussed the matter of infrequent celebration of the Lord's Supper in Book I, Chapter III. But a brief communal prayer of thanks upon the presentation of the gifts is also not out of place at a eucharistic service. Since there is a great prayer of thanksgiving, maybe there could also be a shorter one. Thankfulness for God's saving love in Jesus Christ is surely at the heart of worship,

as indicated by Luther's single sentence definition of worship: "the tenth leper turning back" cited in Buttrick 1987, 338. Another approach is to have one of the musical settings of "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" sung by the congregation upon the presentation of the gifts and let that serve as a prayer of communal self-dedication, prayer over the gifts, and prayer of thanksgiving. Ideally, any liturgical prayer at this place in the service should conclude with the quality of majesty, dignity, and simplicity that is so elegantly modeled in the classic self-offering sentence that has served both as a prayer over the money offerings and a conclusion to the great eucharistic prayer over the gifts of bread and wine: "O God, who called us from death to life: we give ourselves to you; and with the church through all ages we thank you for your saving love in Jesus Christ our Lord" (*The Worshipbook* 1970-1972, 36, following earlier books of various denominations). If that classic prayer is incorporated in the eucharistic prayer—the great thanksgiving—and said at the time when the gifts of money have been brought forward along with the gifts of bread and wine, the one reading could add "and we dedicate these gifts to the ministries of your church." I have incorporated that clause in the prayers of dedication appended parenthetically to each of the brief exemplar prayers of thanks keyed to the principal lection of the day, intended for unison reading by the whole assembly, here and following in Chapters IV and V. Another possible use of these brief prayers of thanksgiving is to adapt and incorporate them as part of the eucharistic prayer—the great thanksgiving—when the service includes the sacrament. Deiss 1992, 70-71, provides some cautionary guidance about this approach of striving mightily to unify the prayers and other texts of the service around a scriptural theme or a church teaching, i.e., the dangers of theological abstraction in the formulation of liturgical prayers and loss of meaning through ritual repetition in long usage..

[¶6] When I was developing and preaching my way through this Gospel Lectionary, I

frequently used published liturgical prayers selected from various collections and liturgical resource books. I did not speak attribution for the copied and paraphrased prayers, which I do not and did not consider necessary or appropriate in conducting a worship service since the resources were created and sold for the express purpose of having them used in the way that I used them. The prayers that I spoke alone as a worship leader were not in a form intended to be purchased in bulk and handed out to the gathered worshipers. I did keep a file of those prayers along with my original compositions but did not always document the identity and source of the borrowed prayers. I now understand that in the cases where I incorporated the copied or paraphrased prayers in the worship handout or screen projection for all to recite together there should have been a brief attribution appended. I have made a strong effort in the present collection to replace all of the copied prayers with original ones. If I have inadvertently included a previously published prayer or a close paraphrase or adaptation of one, without attribution, I apologize to all concerned and humbly beg their forbearance.

[¶7] Words of Absolution or Declaration of Forgiveness have been provided in the section on the Psalms and are keyed to a “Psalm of the Day” rather than to the principal reading. Other liturgical texts keyed to psalm selections—Call to Worship, Call to Confession, and Call for Offerings—are also provided in the section on the Psalms.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth, to also be watchful and get our lives in order for his final appearing. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, we do not know the day or the hour of your final coming and we confess that we are hardly ever ready. We continue to eat and drink, work and play, and plan weddings as if you were not present and not coming. Please forgive us this lack of preparedness and open our eyes that we may be aware of every sign of your presence and ready for your final appearing. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O Lord, that we have already experienced the coming again of Christ, through his coming into our hearts by faith and through his presence in this believing fellowship. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes by the light of your Word, O God, and fill our hearts with the power of your Spirit, so that we can see how to change the direction of our lives and have the strength to do it. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Father of mercy, we admit that sometimes our prayer of confession is a formal and outward response, without deeds that express true repentance or turning around. We know that we are falling short and doing wrong. Please turn us around by the warming fire of your grace and Spirit, and deliver us from the destructive fire of your judgment. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for the Christmas expectancy of Christ's coming and presence in our midst to re-ignite the fire of love in our fellowship and the fire of excitement in our mission. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

God our creator, fill us up with a quiet confidence in you. We wonder and we think, and sometimes we have our doubts. Renew us with the good news that you are here indeed; through Jesus Christ your son our Lord, who lives and rules with you and the holy Spirit one God within our world today. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we confess that we have not always been patient enough to see your coming and your presence in our lives. We have brought suffering and judgment upon ourselves by grumbling against one another. Please forgive our blindness and impatience and help us to follow the prophets' example of suffering and patience, we pray in the name of the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for the people in our lives who never call attention to themselves, but who, by their example of simple living and humble service, call our attention to the Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, your eternal Word took flesh on earth beginning when Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Open our minds and hearts to receive your Spirit who prepares us for the coming of your Son, the Word made flesh. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God that much of the time we neglect to look for signs of your presence in our life and in the events around us. Please forgive our failure to ask and to look for signs that you are able to do something about our present situation; and please open our eyes to the signs that you have given and are giving, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for giving such a wonderful sign of your power and your presence in our life and in our world, the sign of Immanuel, God with us, in Jesus the Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our minds and hearts by your Spirit in this worshiping fellowship, O God. May we come to sense that we are standing on holy ground, in your presence, and that your angel messengers are all around, ready to help and guide us through all the struggles and dangers of this life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we may stubbornly remain in dangerous situations that you would have us flee; just as we may also run away as cowards from places where you would have us take a stand. Please forgive us these sins and send us angel messengers to guide and encourage us in every circumstance. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for protecting the holy family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, so that our own families might be preserved in faith and set apart for your service. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, CHRISTMAS 2, MATTHEW 19:1-12

OPENING PRAYER

We gather in your name, O God, each of us bringing our individual story and experience of the joys and the pains of family life. Please help us to find healing anew for our hurt and brokenness, and to celebrate the goodness of your gift of family life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess with the poet that we often hurt the ones we love, just the ones we shouldn't hurt at all. Please forgive us our failure to be kind, patient, gentle and respectful in our most intimate relationships. Help us to find ways of healing and help when we have been injured and when we have become part of the cycle of hurting and being hurt. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, that we can now have new lives of joy and peace, even when we have been through terrible experiences of hurt and failure, including divorce. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EPIPHANY 1, MATTHEW 3:13-17

OPENING PRAYER

Most merciful Father, who baptized your Son into a healing ministry that brings wholeness to body, mind and spirit: give us the blessing of his saving presence, so that we may experience healing that will restore us to wholeness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

Father in heaven, we praise you for Jesus, your anointed servant. But we confess that it is too easy for us to speak of his servant role without letting him fulfill his ministry in us. Forgive us for the needs we have that we do not allow Jesus to meet. Help us to learn how to let him be your servant to us and to give us the healing and deliverance that we need. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for sending Jesus as a servant to the people, to show us the way of suffering and service; and for calling your church to be a servant people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes and our hearts to your Word, Lord God, that we might hear in Jesus' call of the first disciples your calling of our names and your invitation to renewed lives of love and service among your people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we know very well that our lives and the world that we live in are under your authority and within the realm of your kingdom. Yet we drift into forgetfulness and living as if we had no king. Please forgive us and help us by your Word and Spirit to turn around, and to follow again in the way of Jesus and his first disciples. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you God for people who have the gift of being able to drop their regular routines to answer a call for help. Thank you for making that same grace available to us through the power of your Word and Spirit. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EPIPHANY 3, MATTHEW 5:1-12

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, your peace makes happy those who trust you as a heavenly parent. Help us to learn and practice the ways that make for peace, so that we may be recognized as your children. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we desire your presence. But we know there is no room for you when we exalt ourselves. Forgive us the pride and selfishness that deny us the security of your love and providence. Make us humble and lowly of heart so that we may have the joy of your presence supporting us in our daily lives. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O Lord, your presence is the happiness of every situation. Our relationship with you brings a kind of holiness and healing to all of our relationships. Thank you for being present with us and for the gift of fellowship with you, through Christ our Lord. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) Amen.

YEAR 1, EPIPHANY 4, MATTHEW 5:13-16

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Spirit, O God, to open our eyes to the light of your Word, so that we might be light and so that others might sense your presence in our presence. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

You have given new zest and brightness to our lives through Jesus Christ, O God. But these have grown stale and dim because of our failure to share them with others. Please forgive us and help us to let our lights shine, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that light has come into our lives by your Word and Spirit in this family of faith. Thank you that lives grown bland and tasteless can have their true flavor restored here. Thank you for calling us to be salt and light in the world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EPIPHANY 5, MATTHEW 5:17-26

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, open our eyes that we may see wondrous things in your law. Open our hearts that we might be changed by your highest law, the law of love in Christ. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Heavenly Father, we comfort ourselves that we have not broken your laws against theft and murder. Yet this same feeling of pride and self-satisfaction convicts us. For we have harbored resentments that rob us and others of your most precious gift of love in the human family, that is, the family spirit that we keep on murdering every day. Please forgive and help us, through Christ your son, our brother. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, we thank you for your law, which is a light to our path, and for your gospel which brings us back to the path whenever we stray. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Spirit into our midst, O God. Fill us with your love, so that the intentions of our hearts may be consistent with your good pleasure. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Heavenly Parent, we have committed adultery by using people rather than loving them. We have divorced ourselves from your love by looking for loopholes in your law. We have sworn promises when the simple truth was not in us. Please help us to look honestly at ourselves, that our hearts might be changed by your love and forgiveness. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you God for the mind of Christ, the mind of self-sacrifice and surrender, the mind that overcomes our lust for power over other people and makes us free to give of ourselves. Thank you that the church family is learning more and more to be a healing community. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes, Lord, that we may see the futility of our endless rounds of argument and fighting. Show us once again the miracle of victory through surrender. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that sometimes our strong stand for “the truth” is actually our old conditioned response of defensiveness and resistance to change and new information. Please forgive us and help us to recognize and name and defeat our old demon of general inertia whenever it rears its ugly head. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you for the family of faith that has shown Christ’s love to us by including us and accepting us with all of our faults. Thank you for the grace that makes us free and strong to share your love with people who have hurt us and are very hard to love. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Shine the light of your Word and your Spirit into our hearts, O God, so that, filled with your light, we may see light truly. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We continue to be blinded by the many distractions of this fallen world, O God, including our own presumption of clear vision. Have mercy on us through Jesus your son, born of your Spirit yet descended from David the great Hebrew king. Forgive our stubborn blindness and open our eyes once again to your presence in our life and world through Christ the king. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the light of your Word and the power of your Spirit. Thank you for your mercy in restoring our vision once again. Thank you for *being* our vision by day and by night. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EPIPHANY 9 (LAST), MATTHEW 17:1-9

(Skip to this for last Sunday before Lent when

Epiphany has fewer than 9 Sundays)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to see the bright vision of Jesus in company with your prophets Moses and Elijah, and to see ourselves in company with the great procession of witnesses to your healing presence in the world. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess our sinful compulsion to launch programs, build buildings, and establish memorials, O God, forgetting that your gifts of light and beauty cannot be so enshrined or captured, not even by the best of human art and enterprise. Please forgive us for not knowing what to do or say about the beauty of your holiness. Help us learn how to say and do nothing, but to stand quietly in awe and thankfulness. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for mountain top experiences --- bright visions of the goodness and beauty of your creation and of your healing for the hurt and brokenness in our life and in the world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, LENT 1, MATTHEW 6:7-9

OPENING PRAYER

Father in heaven, touch our lives today with the cleansing fire of your Holy Spirit, so that we may glorify your name and show forth your holiness in our lives with every thought and every action, we pray through Jesus Christ, your Son our Brother who reveals you as our loving Father. Amen.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

Heavenly Father, we confess that, we ourselves have not honored your name by living the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, in our own lives. Forgive us for failing to match our words of prayer with our action prayers. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Father, for claiming the whole human race as your first family, even though the world has gone after other gods and cut itself off from its true family of origin. And thank you, Father, for your only true Son, Jesus the Christ, who has adopted us as his sisters and brothers, so that we may be restored to our true family of origin and once again be called your children, and so that we may honestly call you Father. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.). We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to learn from the example of Jesus in prayer. May we always pray first for the honoring of your name, the final establishment of your rule, and the universal doing of your will. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that the honoring of your name, the final establishment of your rule, and the universal doing of your will are not the first things we would have prayed for without your prompting. Forgive us for putting other concerns and even other *things* at the top of our prayer lists. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the three-fold reminder to always put first things first in our prayers: the honoring of your name, the final establishment of your rule, and the universal doing of your will. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to learn more and more to trust you for our basic needs of daily survival, whether we have little or much; and help us always to share what we have with people who are lacking. We pray through Jesus the Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

We would rather pray for spiritual bread, O God, trusting only ourselves for material needs. Forgive our misplacement of trust. Help us to put all our trust in you, and to take our bread one day at a time. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the many blessings and comforts that we enjoy. May we have grace to share with your hungry children in our neighborhood and all around the world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Grant us, O God, to encounter your Word of grace so that our hearts may be melted by your readiness to forgive, and so that we may become more forgiving in spirit, and, thus, be able to truly receive your forgiveness. We pray through Christ the Lord.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that sometimes we say “It’s nothing” or “No problem,” when in fact we have been hurt by some oversight or insult. Forgive us for refusing to admit that we have been offended. Help us to face the fact that we are capable of hurting and being hurt. May we learn how to be forgiving and be forgiven. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for your great forgiveness in Jesus Christ, which makes us free to forgive and receive forgiveness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, let the light of your Spirit shine into our hearts anew today, so that we may submit ourselves freely to your leadership in our lives, and so be delivered from all fear of future tests and evils. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

Sometimes we timidly wish to avoid the ordinary trials and tests of life, even though we need them to develop faith and courage and strength of character. Forgive us such cowardice in the face of small troubles, O God, and spare us the *great* trials that might crush our spirits and separate us from you. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Almighty God, we give thanks to you for your generous provision at this time, for your leading us through times of testing, and for your delivering us from evil times of extreme hardship. And we thank you most especially for Jesus, who was severely tempted by the Evil One, yet overcame so that we might have courage and strength for our everyday battle with evil. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, PASSION/PALM SUNDAY, MATTHEW 6:14-15

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we journey with Jesus toward the cross, to embrace his spirit of surrender and sacrifice, so that we may be able to forgive each other and live in the grace of your forgiveness. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we have associated your work of atonement in the cross of Christ mainly with our eternal salvation as individuals. Forgive our self-centered otherworldliness. Help us to experience your atonement in our forgiving and forgiven relationships with other people in the here and the now. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the pageantry of Palm Sunday, and for your sacrifice on the cross, which reconciles us with you and makes us free and strong to forgive each other. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EASTER, MATTHEW 28:1-10

OPENING PRAYER

We rejoice, O God, in the promise and hope of new life that are signaled by the emptiness of Jesus' tomb and by his glorious appearances to the first disciples. Let our celebration today raise us up and renew our lives by the Spirit that is within us. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

The crucified and risen Christ is our Passover feast, O God. The old leaven of envy and selfishness cannot remain in our hearts, our homes or our churches while we share this new bread of sacrifice, forgiveness and peace. Please forgive us for presuming that we are big enough to keep both kinds of bread on hand. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord God, for baptizing us into the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, and thus cleansing us of the old leaven of pride and jealousy. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EASTER 2, MATTHEW 18:1-4

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, teach us once again how to have child-like trust in you as our loving parent, and to accept the joy and the responsibility that you have given us, through Jesus our brother. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We must admit, O God, that there are times when we are just a little bit too pleased with ourselves for being better than someone at something. Please forgive us and help us to be satisfied just to be accepted as we are by you, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for adopting us as your children through Jesus your Son. Help us more and more to put our whole trust in you and depend upon you, and to hold your hand for guidance and strength in our daily walk. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ Jesus our brother. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get a new awareness and sensitivity to how our words and actions may hurt someone or cause one of your little ones to get the wrong idea and perhaps take the wrong path, or stumble and fall down. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O Lord, that we have not always been open and receptive to our fellow believers, and that we have even done things that could cause someone else to go the wrong way. Please forgive us for the defensive walls that we sometimes build around our lives, and for our insensitivity to the feelings and beliefs of other people. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, that you have revealed your mysteries to the simple and not to the wise. Please help us not to be too smart for our own good, so that we may not be a stumbling block to ourselves or to any of your other little ones. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, open my eyes to recognize that I am the one lost sheep that the Shepherd has risked all to rescue. And open my heart to accept my least savory neighbor as the one lost sheep that the Shepherd would not have me avoid or ignore. I pray through Christ my Shepherd. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, Lord Jesus: some of your little ones have become lost, and no one from our community has gone after them. Yet we have gone on praising the Good Shepherd for going out and rescuing the lost one! Forgive us this hypocrisy and give us the courage, wisdom, and love to seek and bring back the lost sheep. We pray in your name. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for being the only God who is creator of the universe. Thank you also for being the only one among the gods who actively seeks and brings back your strayed and rebellious children. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, we pray that your Spirit will open our minds and hearts to the correction and discipline of your Word today, so that we may accept our responsibility to correct and discipline one another and to be corrected and disciplined by one another in this fellowship of faith. We pray through Jesus the Christ, our brother and our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, sometimes we try to deal with conflicts in our family, church, and community by ignoring them and pretending they do not exist. Please forgive our stubborn resistance. Give us the courage to face up to things and solve differences with the wisdom given in your Word. Through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the good news of reconciliation in Jesus, the Word made flesh. Thank you for the inspired wisdom in your Word of Scripture. Thank you for the human knowledge and skills of conflict management and conflict resolution. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, EASTER 6, MATTHEW 18:21-22

OPENING PRAYER

Let your love flood our hearts today, O God, by the generosity of Jesus your Word and the overflow of your Spirit among us, so that we may get free of all thoughts of score keeping in the matter of forgiving any neighbor who may injure or offend us. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that there are some neighbors we are still struggling to forgive just once, not to mention endless repetitions of their offensiveness. Have mercy on us, Lord. Help us to accept your weak and injured children that are so hard to love. Help us to truly desire the best for those we find most repulsive. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for not counting the times we have asked and received your forgiveness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Spirit of love to melt our hearts, O God, so that the word of your great forgiveness can turn us into forgiving people, truly accepting and forgiving both ourselves and those who have injured us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we who have been forgiven much by you, and at such great cost, are often resistant and slow to forgive and let go of even the smallest slights and injuries by our neighbors. Please forgive us once again for this hardness; soften our hearts and teach us the art of forgiving. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for taking the initiative and breaking the deadlock of alienation by forgiving us before we even ask. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

YEAR 1, PENTECOST, MATTHEW 18:18-20

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Holy Spirit among us today, O God, and restore our trust in your promise to be with us in this fellowship of faith, so that we may be a community empowered by you to speak and act together in accordance with your will. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Heavenly Father, there are times when we try to handle our differences without your help, and we injure your church and our families. Forgive us for the divisions we cause by denying our common dependence on your presence in the Spirit. Restore us to unity in love and mission by the power of your Word and Spirit. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the authority and responsibility that belong to us in the church by the promise and gift of your continuing presence with us in the Spirit whenever we are truly assembled in the name of your Son, our Lord, Jesus the Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, ADVENT 1, MARK 12:1-12

OPENING PRAYER

Here we are, Lord, looking for you to come and visit your lands once again as we approach the birth of your Son Jesus. Open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts by your Word and your Spirit. The fields and vineyards that we work are all yours and we are but tenant farmers. Fill us anew with your grace that we may thankfully and obediently give you your due. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

The promised final coming of your Son, Lord God, rivets our attention upon our failure to give you the owner's share of the produce of this vineyard. Please forgive and help us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord God, for sending your Son, and for uniting us with him in death and resurrection, by which we are restored to our original trust as keepers of your vineyard. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to hear the cry of your prophets and to recognize what we have in common with all people everywhere, so that we might be ready to receive your Son, who comes to reconcile us with you and with each other, through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We seem to be waiting for some new Elijah or some new John the Baptist to show up before we welcome your presence into our lives, O God. Please forgive our blind resistance and open our hearts to your coming and your presence in your Son Jesus the Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O Lord, for the moments of upheaval and disturbance in our lives that have caused us to stop and to recognize any negative or self-defeating attitudes or behaviors that may have become habitual with us, and have caused us to take more notice of the good things in our lives and to be more open to your coming and your presence in Jesus the Christ, your Son and our Lord. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, we have gathered here to praise you for the good things in our world and in our lives, and to celebrate the joyful expectations of this Advent Season. But if our upbeat attitude of praise is covering up any hurt or loss in our life that needs to be acknowledged and laid before you, we ask for the help of your Word and your Spirit to present these hurts and losses today for your healing and for the release that only you can give. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have often hailed John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Christ, but we have avoided the part about John's gruesome death at the hands of evil and frivolous people, which is a preview of Jesus' gruesome death at the hands of evil and frivolous people, people like us. Please forgive and help us through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord God, for John the Baptizer, who announced the coming of the Christ in his preaching, his baptizing, and his dying. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we pray that the son of David who is your only begotten Son may come into our hearts and illumine our minds anew today, so that we may feel your presence in our midst and see you at work in our lives and in our world once more. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We proclaim too loudly our absolute belief in the miracles of Jesus' birth, Lord God, while forgetting that your revelation in Christ is intended to open our eyes to the miracle of your presence in our own lives and the miracle of your activity in the world around us. Forgive our stubborn blindness, dear God, and touch our hearts and minds with the sight-restoring light of your Word and your Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for Jesus the son of David, who is also your Son, and David's Lord, and our Brother, and our Lord. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, CHRISTMAS 1, MARK 10:1-12

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes, O God, to the love and grace and beauty in the humble family life of Jesus with his parents, Mary and Joseph. And open our hearts to the love and grace and beauty in the gift of marriage and family life that you have ordered from all eternity as a part of your great creation. And melt our hard hearts that we may be delivered from all the legalism of the Pharisees in the matters of marriage and divorce. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we are hard to teach when it comes to taking care of those human relationships about which we care most deeply. Please forgive and help us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the promise and the possibilities of the coming “new year” in our somewhat arbitrary system of counting the days and weeks and months of this life and world that you have created and entrusted to us. And thank you also for your grace of forgiveness and for the chance to make new beginnings when our lives have been wrecked by events beyond our control or by our own mistakes and mutual misunderstandings. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, CHRISTMAS 2, MARK 10:13-16

OPENING PRAYER

We praise you, God, for creating the human family to live in complete dependence upon you as trusting and obedience children of you our heavenly Father. And we praise you for continuing to call us back in your Son Jesus to that original vision human life in this world that you brought into being and called it good from the word go. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, to both smugness in our patience and tolerance with children, and to over-much guilt and defensiveness when we have lost our patience. Please forgive, Lord, and grant us to grow from self-imposed patience to the gift of childlike trust and acceptance, and complete dependence upon your help. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for Jesus' example of living his life in complete dependence upon you, our heavenly Father, through his practice of taking time out in quiet time alone with you for prayer and reflection. And thank you for the written record of your revelation of yourself to the world in Christ, so that each of us may talk one on one with you each and every day of our life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, EPIPHANY 1, MARK 6:6b-13

OPENING PRAYER

Today, O God, we celebrate your revelation of yourself to the world through the mission and ministry of your Son Jesus and his apostles among the villages of Galilee so long ago and far away. Grant to us by your Word and your Spirit to gain new insight and renewed commitment to the mission and ministries that you have given to us in the time and place where we are. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Oh, but it's hard to be faithful and obedient to our mission in the world when the visible results are so poor, Lord God. We are not good at it and our commitment to it tends to fall away when the results don't measure up to our hopes and expectations. Forgive our little faith and let us have a new epiphany, a new revelation of the mission you have given to us in Jesus Christ. Make us free and strong for the work with a new assurance that the final results of our efforts are completely safe in your care and providence. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, that the mission of the twelve apostles that Jesus presented as a hurried up emergency effort requiring them to travel light and to move right along is also our mission today, but with the added power of the Easter and Pentecost events behind us. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, EPIPHANY 2, MARK 6:30-44

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as you fed the people in the wilderness with the manna from heaven, and as our Lord fed the crowd by the sea shore with the loaves and the fishes, so feed our spirits today with the nourishment of your Word and your Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, you sometimes reveal yourself to us in wonders, spontaneous cures, mighty works, miracles, surprise blessings and “special effects.” Yet, so much of the time we stubbornly remain oblivious or blind to your presence and activity in the everyday routines and the ordinary narrative of our life and the mundane goings-on in the environments where we live. Please forgive us, and help us to see with eyes of faith. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the miracle of renewed faith in the goodness of life, the renewed sense of purpose and meaning in life as it is happening to us at this time, and the renewed hope for the future of your church, your family of faith, that happens when we gather around our family tables at home and when we gather around your table in this fellowship to break bread in loving fellowship and to break open the spiritual bread that is to be found in your words of Scripture. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, during these turbulent times, when the going is very hard for our spirits, to sense that you are always passing by to keep checking on our spiritual safety. Help us to know that whether we are out at sea, or up in the air, or bogged down in mud or sand, that you are always present and that you are always struggling and pulling along with us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, that we do not always recognize you when you come to us in one form or another in the midst of our everyday routines or struggles. We so often miss the miraculous aspect of our survival of the worst disasters and failures of our lives. And we overlook the wonderful gift of all the good days and successes that we enjoy. And so much of the time we fail to recognize the miracle of meeting you wherever we are. Forgive our dullness and skepticism, Lord. Sharpen our awareness and open our hearts to the wonder of you. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for sending your Son Jesus to check on our safety and well-being in the midst of the frightening winds of change in the world today, especially when our life together in the Christian fellowship becomes storm tossed by confusion and party spirit within the church. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by the power of your Word and Spirit, to learn from the successful healing ministry of Jesus how it is that you expect our church here in this place at this time to be a healing presence among the people of our town and area. Open our eyes to see how our church fellowship can become a stronger magnet for attracting those people who need the healing ministry of this fellowship. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we have not been quick to recognize your presence in our midst and to bring in all the people who need your healing touch. Please forgive us and help us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the attractiveness of Jesus that drew so many people in to touch even just the fringe of his cloak in order to receive some of his healing power. And thank you for the wholeness that we feel in our lives just from being exposed a little bit to the edges of your faith movement. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, send your Holy Spirit of light into our hearts today and open our minds to the words of Jesus recorded in Scripture. Help us to look honestly and unflinchingly at how we think about the organization and the global mission of the larger church of which our congregation is a part. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that sometimes we use the safety of rules and traditions, which we respect very carefully, to hide our real transgression, which is a failure to recognize human feelings and to care for human needs. Please forgive us and help us to correct our attitudes and our actions. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for your word of Scripture, handed down from one generation to another, and for your living Word Jesus Christ, who opens our eyes and our minds to the true spirit and the heart of your words. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, send your Holy Spirit among us today so that our minds may be filled light from your Word. Show us how we can be a more open and inviting fellowship and more ready to reach out in support Christ's mission to all the peoples of the world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have a natural resistance, O God, to the thought that we might need to reconsider the direction we have been going with our lives or with the life of our church fellowship. This natural inertia can be a good and stabilizing fact of life most of the time. But sometimes we hold on too tight, and we need your help to be able to loosen our grip on things as they are and open our minds and hearts to new possibilities that you want us to consider. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you God for Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and work were full of struggles, decisions, and changes, like ours. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, EPIPHANY 7, MARK 7:31-37

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, please open our ears, so that we may hear your Word afresh today, become free once again to speak truly, and receive power and freedom to give ourselves up in showing your love to suffering people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we confess that we are like people with impaired hearing, not able to speak clearly in telling others of your love for them because we have not truly heard your message of love toward us. Come close to us today by your Word and Spirit, and caress our ears with your loving touch, so that we might speak to others more clearly of your gentle presence in this life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the signs of your presence and power among us: the gentle human touch that restores hope and the simple act of help that says love. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, please send your Spirit among us this morning. Help us to be shaped once again to the servant form of Jesus Christ, so that from now on our lives may reflect your image. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we confess that sometimes we lack the courage to confront and expose harmful falsehood and hypocrisy in the moment of encounter when it is clearly our responsibility to speak up and take a stand. We ask you to forgive our cowardice and fill us with your Spirit of truth, the Spirit that calmly confronts pious and self-righteous pretenders with a simple statement of the facts. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for Jesus of Nazareth, the One who shows us how to live this life, and how to take care of your world; the one who shows us how to live as people who were created in Your image and thus to reflect Your glory. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we gather in worship to acknowledge your authority over all things. And we also ask you to give us by your Word and Spirit today a sense of discernment, so that we may recognize when people with human credentials also speak and act with the authority of spiritual truth and when they do not. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

When you come to us in the persons and events of our lives, O God, we sometimes claim not to know whether it is you or not. We ask for credentials or by what authority these things are happening because we don't really want to think of changing anything about ourselves or our surroundings. Please forgive our fearful and defensive posturing and give us the courage to quit dodging your ambassadors. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord God, for the gift of faith by your Holy Spirit, the gift that opens our eyes and hearts to recognize and receive Jesus as your Son and our Lord, and to recognize him in some of the most surprising places and persons and events of our lives. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ, the light of our lives. Amen.

YEAR 2, LENT 1, MARK 14:1-2, 10-11

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes by our encounter today with your Word and your Spirit in this fellowship, O God. Help us to see why the gentle ways of Jesus were such a threat to the leaders of conventional religion and also a disturbance to at least one in the circle of his closest followers. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Dear God, we have oftentimes been silent collaborators in the conspiracy to domesticate the cross and make Christianity upbeat. We have sometimes treated the Bible as nothing more than a positive self-help guide rather than the profound record of your judgment and your mercy, the history of your creative and saving activity from all eternity to all eternity. Forgive our Judas-like betrayal and help us to take up our crosses anew. We pray in his name. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, that the church of Jesus Christ has recognized all down through Christian history the fact that gospel healing requires that we deal with the negative aspects of our life and world and that the church helps us to do this as we portray and act out the suffering and the sacrifice of Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Set us free, O God, from any compulsion to justify our actions with hard-headed guidelines and priorities. Make us free by your Spirit to do good and beautiful service for Jesus, not because we must but because we may. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS (AND DEDICATION)

Loving and gracious God, we confess that sometimes we have splurged in impulse buying or invested in high risk enterprises when we should have spent more time counting the cost. But at other times we have held back and been over-cautious when we should have gone all out in the service of love and compassion. Forgive us, God, for our failures of judgment and our lack of spiritual discernment. Give us the mind to think clearly and the heart to act generously. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the good news of the Gospel in Jesus Christ, the Gospel that calls us to be strong and wise in rendering a good stewardship and a sound accounting of all the gifts and resources that you have entrusted to our care; the same Gospel that makes us free to give lavishly in good and beautiful acts of love and compassion. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, during these moments of praise and meditation, to have our hearts opened up by your Word and by your Spirit, that a place might be prepared within us and among us for you to come in and dwell with us and eat with us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, that we are puzzled as to where in our universe and in our lives we can prepare a place for your kingdom and for your presence with us. Please forgive and help us to recognize and follow your true messengers, the ones that will tell us where and how to prepare a place for you. We pray in his name. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord God, for this place that your friends have fitted out for your table and for the renewal of our communion with you. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by the power of your Word and Spirit, to get a new awareness of where you have put us, what you have given us, and what you would have us do. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We can identify all too well with the disciples' question "Is it I, Lord?" – "Surely not I?", when Jesus announced that one of them would betray him. We are so full of self-confidence one moment and so full of self-doubt the next. Forgive our double mindedness, O God, and help us to trust you and be true to you. We pray in his name. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for One who sees into our hearts and knows every motive and intention that we have, yet forgives us, and invites us to go forward in his service and fellowship, Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, LENT 5, MARK 14:22-25

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God by your Word and your Spirit, as we remember the final Passover meal of Jesus with his disciples, to gain a new sense of our unity with each other in this church fellowship, and of the unity of your Son Jesus the Christ with us in the goodness, the sacrifices, and the hopes of this life in a fallen and hurting world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, that the Lord's Supper, given by Jesus to unite us with you and with all people, has often been the occasion for division due to human interpretation. Please forgive and help us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for family tables and for friends sharing a large corner booth in a restaurant, signs of the goodness of life together in this world. And thank you for altars or family tables in Christian churches all over the world, signs of our oneness with you and with all people through the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus the Christ. And thank you for the hope and promise of the marriage supper of the Lamb which is in heaven. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, PASSION/PALM SUNDAY, MARK 11:11-26

OPENING PRAYER

Today, O God, we remember how Jesus was so incensed by practices near the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem, practices that were a hindrance to people coming to honor you. Help us to recognize anything in this church that might get in the way of people who would come here to honor you and to share in our fellowship with you. And give us the faith we need to work and pray for the removal of any such blemish or obstruction from our midst. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We humbly confess, O God, that we are sometimes poor disciples, no more productive than a barren fig tree. And some of our church practices may get in the way of possible pilgrims who would come in and worship you and share in our fellowship with you. Forgive us, we pray, dear God. And give us the vision, wisdom, and courage to make the changes that are needed in our personal discipleship and in our life and ministry together in this community. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his entry into the Temple, his entry into this church, and his entry into our hearts; and for his reforming and cleansing words and works of judgment and healing. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

God our Father, by raising Christ your Son you conquered the power of death and opened for us a new way of life, a life where humble service and ultimate sacrifice can lead to freedom and victory rather than defeat and oppression. Show us by your Word and your Spirit how we can see this new order of things in the world today and how we can live this new way in our lives tomorrow. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, that sometimes we forget, and are blind to the presence of your risen Christ in our fellowship around this table. Please forgive us and open our eyes to his presence in the breaking of bread today. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for opening to us a new way and a new order of things for life in this world. Help us to keep ever before us the vision of Christ crucified and risen, Christ who shows us the way of freedom and hope through surrender and sacrifice, Christ who gives us freedom and strength to do the best we can with what we have where we are. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be honest with ourselves and with you when we are headstrong and willful. Help us even more to surrender our wills to your will, so that we may find our true destiny and our ultimate joy and fulfillment. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We think we know our own strength of commitment and we sometimes feel quite self-confident of our own loyalty and faithfulness. But you are well aware of our weakness under stress and the denials of which we are capable. You also know that we often fall asleep when we should be watching and waiting with you. Forgive us, God and help us to be strong and true to you in how we deal with the world as it is. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the example of our brother, Jesus, who was completely human in willing to avoid the agony of the cross, yet whose devotion to your will overcame everything else. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, EASTER 3, MARK 14:43-52

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we remember the oppression and injustice done to our Lord in his last day, to know that these evils have been rebuked and defeated in his resurrection, and that in that faith we are free and strong to stand for truth and righteousness in all things. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God: we sometimes doubt your intentions when we see such horrible things happening in your world. Yet we know and believe that you are the ruler of the universe. Forgive our weak faith and help us to believe your faithfulness when we cannot see your purpose in certain events. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

God, we thank you for Jesus and his complete trust in your purpose, even when that meant submission to his enemies and desertion by his friends. And thank you for the gospel writer who verified the factual basis of his account by including in his description of the background scene “stuff that no one could make up.” (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 2, EASTER 4, MARK 14:53-65

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we pray for insight and wisdom from your Word and by your Spirit, as we reflect on the inquisition of Jesus by a high council of religious leaders. May we gain a better perspective on the frequent efforts within church organizations in our times to have the opinions and practices of certain people within a church community declared contrary to the Scriptures or outlawed by a denomination's form of church order. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, we have to be candid with you: we make a fairly good pretense of inquiring about strange claims and proposals even when we have already made up our minds to dismiss them. Please forgive our prejudgments and help us to be truly inquisitive. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

God, we thank you for Jesus' example of courage under persecution by an unfair inquisition. And we thank you also for the example of those people of kind hearts and wise heads who know how to conduct an inquiry with good intentions and with truth and fairness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Teach us, O God, how to recognize and accept our own weakness, so that we may become truly strong by leaning on you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we admit it: if we have never denied Christ in so many words like Peter, it is because we have run away first like the other disciples. Please forgive us and take us back. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

God of all truth, thank you for the candid portrayal of real human life in the gospels, including Peter the great confessor of faith, and Peter the great denier of Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Teach us, O God, by your Word and by your Spirit, so that we may have a better sense of when to speak and when to keep silent. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, we have never shouted “Crucify Him!” But we know in our hearts and confess to you and to each other that we have condemned innocent victims of oppression, tyranny, violence, poverty, and brutality in our own vicinity and all over the world – by our cowardly silence. Please forgive us and grant us courage to step up and speak out when we see suffering innocence. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Almighty God, we thank you for the courageous silence of Jesus in the presence of his persecutors, refusing to dignify the foregone conclusion of their false and twisted case with a futile repetition of the plain truth. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, as we rehearse the story of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, grant by your Word and your Spirit that we may learn from Jesus how to surrender our own wills and make the sacrifices that may be required by the situations and relationships of our lives. And grant that we may learn courage and loyalty from the women who were looking on from a distance, including Mary the mother of Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that the hope of life beyond life that is ours in the death and resurrection of Jesus has sometimes blinded us to the new life and the new order of things that have been inaugurated in the present world of the here and now by our crucified and risen Lord. Forgive our far-focused and other-worldly vision and help us to see more deeply and more clearly what is possible in the world made new through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O loving Father, for what you did and what you are doing through the resurrection of your crucified Son Jesus, giving us a new vision of life and a new possibility of a world where dominance is trumped by surrender and where it is better to serve than to be served. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and gracious God, we who have “grown up in the church” have long been immersed in the fellowship and the culture of your faithful people. Let this church community be flooded by the love of Jesus, so that we may truly say that we are baptized in the Holy Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we have groped everywhere for the Holy Spirit except right here in the love and care of this fellowship. May we feel that gentle breeze in every pore. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that we are drenched in Holy Spirit through the loving fellowship of your church, the family of your Son and our brother, Jesus the Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to see the pressing concerns and business of this season in a healthier, longer-term perspective, as we pause to reflect on the promised final completion of the new order of things that began to come near in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We misread the signs of the times, O God; seeing the cup half emptied rather than half filled. Please forgive us our muddled thinking and help us to see things more clearly in the light of your Word. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for the delay of your final appearing, if delay is the right word. Thank you for giving us more time to enjoy, take care, repair, and be reconciled. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, please open our eyes to the subtle persecution of Christians in our world today. Help us to recognize the cheapening of discipleship by its nominal embrace or toleration in our society. And give us the courage to live by our faith and to make our witness with integrity. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Our quick defensiveness in the face of opposition, O God, blocks out your Spirit, and the grace to answer with a stand instead of an excuse. Lamb of God, you who take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Lamb of God, grant us your peace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the examples of strength and patience under persecution, hardships, and delays that we have in Israel, Jesus, and the Apostles. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, may we find such judgment of ourselves in your self-emptying love, the love that came down at Christmas, that we will be moved to repent, have the mind of Christ, and live his life in ours. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we have sometimes comforted ourselves by admitting we were wrong and asking for forgiveness, while refusing to seek help in changing or hurtful behavior. Please help us, O God, to bear fruit that befits repentance. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the witness of John the Baptist, and for those in our own times who have courage to confront us with our inconsistencies. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

We pray, O God, that as you gave Joseph and Mary the resourcefulness to find a way to make it safely through the crisis of Jesus' birth, you would help any families among us that may be going through times of severe stress to be held fast in your loving care. And help us as a church family to be a safe place for each other in times of hardship. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God: The picture of Jesus' birth in a shed for animals has been fixed in our minds as an idyllic pastoral scene, and we have not often bothered to consider just how desperate the situation was for Mary and Joseph. Forgive our nonchalance, our blithe spirits, our fog of sentimentality about the scene of Jesus' birth. Fill us with awe at the mystery of your chosen way of coming to live among us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the mysterious combination of self-reliance and faith in your providence that we see in your servants, Mary and Joseph. As we walk with Jesus and he walks with us, may we always remember his parents as an example of how families can survive great difficulties, where there is love and commitment and reliance upon you. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, in our relationships with adult family members who have moved away from us or have formed new family connections. May we learn how to enjoy and affirm each other while giving each one a healthy amount of space and freedom. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, there are times when we as families are too demanding of attention from our grown-up children or siblings, and times when we are overly protective of them. Forgive our hovering, O God, and help us to have a good sense of when it is time to let them fly and entrust them more into their own care, the care of others, and your care. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that your Son Jesus the Christ has adopted us disciples as his sisters and brothers, so that we too might be *called* your children. And thank you that you have given us faith by your Spirit so that we might have power to *become* your children. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we begin a new year in your grace, to find true blessings by hearing your word and obeying it. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We talk about the blessings of healthy family life, O God, and we lament the breakdown of the same in our society. But, Oh, how we resist looking at our own families and our family histories. Forgive our resistance, O God, and help us to overcome, and learn how to improve the family patterns that our great grandchildren will inherit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

God, we thank you that Jesus resisted that suggestion by a woman in the crowd of a sentimental reverence for his own family of origin. Thank you that he rejected even that slightest hint of hero worship directed toward him. Thank you that he calls us to the experience of true blessings by the hearing and doing of our heavenly Father's Word. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us through this service of worship to rediscover who we are as your disciples, and become so aware your presence that we go out as apostles, sent to proclaim your word and show your love. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Your gracious calling of us to be disciples and missionaries, O Lord, gives a definite focus to our lives and a clear reason for being. Yet we continually get out of focus and forget who we are and why we are here and what we must be doing. Forgive us, O loving God, and help us to be what we are, telling your story and showing your love. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for Jesus' example of retreating to lonely places for times of conversation with you our heavenly Father, an example that we do well to follow. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 3, EPIPHANY 2, LUKE 8:1-3

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Spirit among us now, O God, to open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to the witness of your written Word as we hear it read and set forth in preaching. Help us to see a wider-angle group picture of the company of disciples that traveled with Jesus, a company not limited to the masculine gender. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Our journey of discipleship is a daily walk and conversation with you through prayer and study and association with other disciples. Yet, there are times, as we move about in this world of sin and sickness, that we have allowed other attractions to divert our attention from your way of truth and love; we have become weak and ineffectual in compassionate service and in words of personal witness. Forgive us, O Lord. Set us free from the distractions that have diverted us from your mission. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the witness and example of those women whose lives were transformed in their encounter with Jesus, and who devoted themselves to his teaching and to the support and work of his mission and ministry in the world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O loving Father, you have promised to use our labor and to bring forth a plentiful harvest in your own time. Help us to believe your promise, to entrust all things into your care, and to labor faithfully and obediently as your thankful stewards. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we humbly confess that we have been people of little faith, despairing of a good outcome because of the present evidence rather than expecting a final fulfillment because of your promises. Forgive us, and grant that we may have at least as much faith in the future as the farmer who scatters the seed upon the earth. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you God for the brilliant and compelling picture of hope and trust in future growth and development that we have in the best known parable of Jesus, the parable of the sower. Thank you for this call to examine what kind of soil we are for the planting and growth of your word of truth. And thank you for this call to patience, trust, and persistence in doing the work of planting the seed of salvation by telling your story and showing your love. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Spirit among us, O God, to open our minds, so that the parables of Jesus may be to us windows that reveal rather than shades that hide the mystery of life as we know it. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we confess that the seed of your word has sometimes found us to be soil that is hard, shallow, or crowded. Forgive us and help us to be the soft and receptive soil in which your word can take root and grow to help us to live productive and hope-filled lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for this loving family fellowship that can soften our hearts and open our minds to your words of mercy and judgment in our lives. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we proclaim and hear the word of Christ, that we may also receive the light of Christ anew into our hearts as the guide for our lives, so that others may see that light in our actions and attitudes and be drawn to the side of Jesus. We pray in your name. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Dear loving and gracious God, we confess that sometimes we have listened to your Word as if we didn't expect it to really give any new Light to our lives; so we have not truly heard or seen, but have kept the Light under a tub. Forgive us this stupidity, and help us to be more careful about our listening, that our hearing may be increased, and the secret of your Life revealed in our life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for revealing the Light of life to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, your Son. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by the power of your Word and your Spirit, to be renewed in the gift of faith, so that trusting you in the midst of the inevitable storms of life, we may not fear but may have courage and may conduct ourselves responsibly and with love. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, God: we are not easily frightened by violent weather, especially when we have done all we can to be prepared and to protect ourselves. But there are other “storms” in life that can easily upset us and cause us to become frightened and desperate: financial set-backs, family disputes, public controversies, church conflicts, temptations of the flesh, accidental death or injury, chronic illness. Forgive our failure of trust in you, O God, and help us learn to rely on your command over the forces of evil and hurting. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the stilling of the storm by Jesus, a sign of your power to calm our fears amidst the upheavals of life. And thank you for giving us the power in Christ to rebuke the fear and panic that sometimes arise in us right when we need to trust you and learn to walk with calm and courage. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by your Word and your Spirit, to recognize destructive powers that may be lurking within our hearts and within the comfortable patterns of our communities and our society. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we have used our modern, enlightened, scientific view of the world to deny the reality of our own hurtful or self-defeating patterns of life and the occasional outbreaks of rage that hurt others and the repressed rage that can be self-destructive. Forgive our self-deceptions and give us courage and the light of your Spirit to acknowledge the powers of evil in our life and world, so that, with your help, we may name our own “demons” and those that afflict our families and communities, and so expel them, or at least manage them more effectively and safely. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the presence and power of your Spirit in this fellowship of faith, and for that name, Jesus, that we can call out whenever we are ready for the destructive powers within us and the hurtful patterns among us to be cast out and defeated. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, as we gather to sing your praise and to proclaim your love, there are some among us who need to see some sign of what you can do to put new life into our hearts, our families, and our communities. Show us your power, O God. Give us a sign of what is possible for us by your Word and your Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord our God, there are people in our lives whom we have given up for lost, as “good” as dead, completely gone and separated from our family or fellowship of love. Forgive, O God, our little faith. Restore in us the hope that is based on your power and your goodness. And show us how to live in that hope. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the hope that is very persistent in the hearts of frightened parents such as Jairus, whose daughter was sick unto death. And thank you for the restoration of that young girl by Jesus, a strong sign of your power to restore life in parts of our spiritual community that we had given up for dead. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 3, EPIPHANY 9 (LAST), LUKE 8:42b-48

(Skip to this for the last Sunday before Lent

when Epiphany is fewer than 9 Sundays.)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be aware of the beauty and the faith and the goodness that you have placed within us, so that our lives and the lives of those we love are made whole again. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We claim you as our Lord and Savior, O Christ. But sometimes we lack the faith to get back in touch with your life for our own healing. Forgive our little faith, O God. Help us to take courage and renewed faith from the example of a woman who reached out and touched the fringe of Jesus' clothes and was made whole again. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O Christ, for your life, available to our touch through this fellowship of your body the church; gathered around your table and made one with you through the power of your Word and Spirit. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to receive your messages of encouragement and strength, brought to us by people like us, some of whom may not realize that they are your angels or messengers. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that that we do a lot of rebelling within ourselves, when life brings us face to face with the necessity of giving up something we hold dear. Forgive our rebellion and help us to know when it is not your will for us to overcome or circumvent but rather your will for us to surrender and go through and accept. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the honesty and courage of Jesus in times of severe testing. Help us to grow in honesty and courage through keeping our eyes upon him. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us today, as we think about Jesus being taken captive by people under the spell of dark forces, to recognize our own darker side, to know that you take us as we are, and can lead us out of the shadows into the light of your presence. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord our God, have mercy upon us for those times when our lives are ruled by dark forces. Help us to get free and to confront your presence in each other. Give us light, O God, so that we may see light truly, and live in your light. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, For Jesus' acknowledgement of the sword in human order, the necessity of arms-bearing by the civil authority. And thank you for his refusal to use arms in his own cause or for his own defense. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our minds, O God, with the light of your Spirit, so that we may receive a fresh vision of what it means to affirm the crucified and risen Jesus as our master and savior, and what it means to live as faithful members of the community of his followers, the community that gathers for worship and fellowship and scatters for service and witness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, O God: as Peter's bold confession at Caesarea Philippi was forgotten in his denial at Jerusalem, so we have often lived as if forgetting our own confession at baptism or confirmation. And if we have never denied Christ in so many words, like Peter, it's because we have run away first, like the other disciples. Forgive us, we pray, and restore in us the courage of our convictions. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the candid portrayals of human potential and human failure that we see in the gospel accounts, including the pictures of Peter the courageous confessor and Peter the cowardly denier. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, help us, by the light of your Word and your Spirit, to gain a better understanding of what Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, and a deeper appreciation of what you accomplished for us in his suffering. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, the many problems we should release to you but hang onto, as if we could be self-reliant. But we also confess that there are some problems we should face and claim rather than delivering them up to the will of others as we often do, as if we could avoid responsibility. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for Jesus' answer to Pilate and his silence before Herod. Help us in our own trials to know when to answer and when to keep silence. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes, O God, so that we may see your love and your salvation in the suffering and the torture that Jesus endured upon the cross. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We would not think of mocking a person being unjustly executed by torture, O God. We claim the crucified one as our Lord and Savior. If we are not fully surrendered to our own particular suffering, if we have not taken up our daily cross willingly and freely, does that make us mockers? Forgive us, O God, if we have mocked Jesus on the cross by thinking that we really understand his crucifixion. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God for opening our eyes to the depth of human sin and the greatness of your love in the cross of Jesus Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes today, O God, so that we may see in the death of Jesus the extent of our human revolt and disobedience and also the depth of your love and forgiveness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have hailed our triumphal entry, Lord Jesus, and praised you for your sacrifice on the cross. Yet we have not entered fully into the new life that you have given to us, by sacrificing our self-centeredness. Forgive us, O God, and help us by the power of your sacrifice to accept our own particular burdens and to follow you obediently. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, that Jesus invites us to come and die with him. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Holy Spirit among us today, O God. Open our hearts and minds so that we may receive and embrace the gift of the mystery of the risen Christ among us with great joy and much fear and trembling. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have tried so hard to rationalize the resurrection of Jesus, O God, that we have missed the point: new life for us, the return of our spirits from the living death of sin and separation. Please forgive and help us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the mystery and gift of resurrection. Thank you for the wonderful sense of the living presence of the crucified and risen Christ among us, making possible a new way of life, a life focused on mutual service and love rather than on dominance and control. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 3, EASTER 2, LUKE 16:14-18

OPENING PRAYER

Help us O God, to gain a true perspective on the gift of your commandments and the gift of your new order of things in the gospel. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we are deeply influenced by the prosperity cult of the society in which we live and which we help to perpetuate. Forgive us for any secret sentiment that you have blessed us with good things because of our right living, or that when we come up short it is your punishment for some offense of ours. Help us to truly embrace your new world order that is based on both your law and your gospel. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for your new world order that lifts the burden of ritual law from us and transforms your ethical laws into a gift of love and freedom through the gospel of your salvation. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to learn from the words of Jesus the art of seeing things as they really are in our everyday relationships and encounters. And show us how to live truly, practically, lovingly, responsibly, faithfully, strongly, and obediently. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, O God, for moments of inattention to the needs and weaknesses of others; forgive us for harboring resentments and unforgiveness; forgive us for underestimating the power of the small faith that is in us; and forgive us for dominating others while forgetting that we ourselves are your servants, called to obedience. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the arresting, convicting, practical, and helpful sayings of Jesus. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes, O God, to the blessings that we have come to take for granted. Help us to remember that the word granted means given, and help us to remember You the Great Giver, and also the human givers that have been your agents in our lives, especially those who have made our lives whole by leading us in the Christian Way. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, it is so hard for us to truly comprehend the suffering and isolation of people afflicted with some horrible disease or people displaced by some massive disaster – unless or until we are stricken by such an experience ourselves. We go too far in distancing ourselves or shielding ourselves from gross suffering. God, forgive our hardness and our unreasoning fear. Restore us to the ways of compassion and help. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for all the people that have helped us all along the way in this life: our family members, physicians, counselors, youth leaders, group sponsors, pastors, teachers, preachers, coaches, mentors, role models, friends, and colleagues. We take them for granted and we thank you for the gift. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 3, EASTER 5, LUKE 17:20-21

OPENING PRAYER

Shine the light of your Spirit into our minds, O God, so that we may open our eyes and see the signs that your kingdom, your new order of things, is indeed present among us and within us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that we have resisted the coming of your kingdom into our hearts and so we have not reshaped and redirected our lives to come into line with your new order of things. And we live in a society that refuses to be reshaped by the new world order that you inaugurated in Jesus Christ. Forgive our stubborn resistance and send your Spirit to blow us to kingdom come. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for your kingdom exhibited in the ancient Hebrew nation, your kingdom exhibited in the church which is the new Israel, and your kingdom which is bringing justice and peace to the whole world through compassion and humble service. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to gain a new perspective on the importance of prayer in our life of faith. May we find in your Word and by your Spirit the encouragement that we need in order to persist in those urgent prayers of ours that have been unanswered for such a long, long time. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

There are times, O Lord, when our prayers have been too breezy and superficial, as if just talking it out with your were the whole purpose of prayer. Forgive us, we pray for secretly doubting that you really do vindicate those who are faithful and persistent in their appeals to you. Restore in us the trust that we need to continue in our most urgent petitions to you without losing heart, but believing that you can and will hear and answer us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the example of persistence in prayer that we have in the life of our adoptive brother, Jesus, your Son, and for his assurance that you will answer the prayers of us, your adopted children. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by the power of your Word and Spirit, to see through our conventional ways of thinking and our comfortable patterns of religious devotion. May we come to a better understanding of what it means that we are not justified by our devotion and discipline but only by your grace and forgiveness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, there are times when we beat up on ourselves too much – like that tax collector – and times when we have prayed too proudly – like that Pharisee. But both of them missed the good news that it is only your grace and forgiveness that can save and redeem us. Forgive us for being so self-absorbed in our ways of prayer. Help us learn how to pray in the spirit of your love and under the assurance of your grace and forgiveness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, we thank you that Jesus became like all people, a willing member of our fallen and sinful gang. Thank you that because of his gift, we can go down to our homes justified and healed, set apart to obey your word and to show your love. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, pour out your Spirit upon us today, so that we may learn to put our trust in you completely, and be set free and empowered to stand bravely for what is true and just in this world, and to defy those that abuse the poorest and the weakest of our society with their legalistic programs. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that there have been times and situations when we kept still and quiet when we should have stood up and spoken out calmly and firmly on behalf of truth against falsehood and on behalf of the weak who were being abused by the strong, and against those who were falsely accusing us by ridiculing our faith community. Forgive us, O God, for our fearfulness and our quietude. Help us to trust your Holy Spirit so that we may be fearless in speaking and acting against falsehood, abuse, and injustice. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit who teaches us what to do and say in each moment of crisis, and who makes us free and strong to do justice and speak truth without fear. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, as we look toward the coming of your Son Jesus into our world, may our eyes be opened to see you in him. May our minds be illumined to behold the Father in the Son. And may the crisis of his coming into our world alert us to the coming crisis of this world's final consummation. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we have ignored the crisis that is signaled by the coming of your Son Jesus into our midst. Forgive our shallow-minded and trivializing ways of marking his advent. Help us to recognize that we are judged in fact by the love and forgiveness of him who comes not to condemn but to heal us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for sending your Son to us who have been dead in our sins. Thank you that we have heard his voice and that your Word and Spirit have raised us up from spiritual death to a new life, a life of loving and serving you. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, open our eyes to your Word and our hearts to the voice of your prophet, John the Baptizer. May his testimony call us back to the vision of life in the Christ who lives in us because we have been baptized into him. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Oh God, we sometimes lust for a dramatic word or a brilliant sign of your coming and presence in our lives and in our world. And our lust for drama and brilliance makes us blind to the presence of the witness in front of us and deaf to her testimony. Forgive our lusting, O God, and open our eyes and ears to your messengers all around us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, for those teachers and preachers in our lives who, like John the Baptist, did not call attention to themselves or tempt us to follow them but rather pointed us toward Jesus and helped us to become his followers. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, ADVENT 3, JOHN 1:1-2, 14

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts, O God, to your presence in our life and our world through all of the sights, sounds, smells, and cares of this Advent time. We pray through Christ our Lord, the Word made flesh. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we short change ourselves by taking guilty pleasure in the material goodies of Christmas, forgetting that these are all signs of your incarnation. Set us free of our unreasoning guilt so that with heads held high we may indulge the flesh with abandon and thankfulness to you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord for the revelation of your life in our midst, through the birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we gather in your name to pause at the peak of this Advent and Christmas time, and ask you to help us as we try to comprehend the complex of longing and anticipation that fills our lives. God, we are completely ready, except for our hearts, and we ask you to finish the job for us today. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Yes, Lord! We come seeking you because you have fed us in the past with your words, and because you perform signs that point us in the direction of our Creator. Forgive us the smallness of our quest, and teach us to feed on the bread of doing the will of our Father. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for preserving us through the wilderness times of our lives. Thank you for the bread of your Word, which comes down from heaven. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, CHRISTMAS 1, JOHN 1:5, 9-13

OPENING PRAYER

O God, we gather to praise you for your great creation and for the amazing gift of your love in Jesus Christ. Help us now to see ourselves in the light of Christ our brother, and so to understand who we are as your children. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we are part of the beautiful world that was created by your Word, yet we fail to see you in our world and in ourselves. You sent the Christ to open our eyes, and yet we still act like blind people, unable to see you in Christ, the world, and ourselves. Forgive us for closing our eyes. Shine the light of Christ on us so brightly today that we are compelled to see him in us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for your wonderful love given to us in Jesus Christ, who has adopted us as his sisters and brothers so that we might see ourselves for who we are: your children. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, CHRISTMAS 2, JOHN 2:3-5

OPENING PRAYER

We gather around your word concerning the adult Christ and his mother. Open our minds to what you would teach us about Jesus and Mary, and how we might understand relationships between parents and grown-up children, adults and their parents. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we are sometimes conflicted over how to love our parents after we have become adults and parents ourselves; and how to love our children when they are no longer dependent, God willing, on our material support. We could surely use some help from you, O God, in how to resolve these questions when they arise. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, what a sense of humor you have! You make us laugh at just the right times and, so, help us to survive our most common human foibles, conflicts, and contradictions. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) Thank you, God! We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we are gathered in hope and expectancy of your presence with us in this fellowship. Let your Holy Spirit descend and remain with us, dove-like. Reveal your presence to us in this family of faith, the body of Christ, as we read and proclaim your word, and as we pray to you through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, it is only through the testimony of people of faith that we know you in Jesus Christ and in the life of the church his body. Yet, we continue to be uncertain and hesitant when it comes to sharing our story of faith with each other and with people who don't know you. Forgive us, God. Open our lips so that our mouths may tell of your goodness. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for revealing yourself to John the Baptist in your Son Jesus of Nazareth. Thank you for the witness of John the Baptist who tells us that we are to encounter you in Jesus the Christ, and in his body the church fellowship. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, EPIPHANY 2, JOHN 1:35-42

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, to discover or rediscover the presence of your Son, Jesus Christ, in our lives. And grant that our fresh sense of discovery may be so transparent that others will recognize the spirit of Christ abiding in us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, how slow we are to pick up on the signals of your witnesses that are pointing out the presence of the Christ as he walks by in our neighborhood. Forgive our dullness and make us free to follow the savior and to become his students and to bring others to his house. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for the witness of John the Baptist and Andrew and for others who have pointed us in the direction of Jesus our savior, and have brought us to his side. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Open our minds and hearts, O God, to the words of Scripture, words that invite us to come and see Jesus in a new light, words that challenge us to invite others to come and see what we have seen. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we understand all too well the skepticism of Nathaniel when he said “Can anything good come out of Nazareth.” We too are skeptical of teachers that lack full academic credentials, or those that come from places we’ve never heard of before. Forgive our habit of prejudgment, O God, and give us the grace to accept the invitation of Philip: “Come and see.” We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the delightful story of Jesus calling Philip and Nathanael to be his disciples. Enlarge our vision that we may see even "greater things" in Jesus than his ability to see into the heart of Nathanael and into our hearts. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Send your Spirit among us, O God, that we might join our hearts together in eagerness to hear your word in a new way. Open our eyes to your work of salvation and judgment through the ministry of Jesus to a cripple man at the pool of Bethzatha in Jerusalem and through the ministry of Jesus to the religious people who accosted him there. We pray through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we all have handicaps and limitations that we must accept and learn to live with. But there are times when we hide behind a supposed limitation that is really only an excuse – a cop out. And sometimes we throw up obstacles to works of love and compassion for those who are weak or hurting, as if such help would violate a religious scruple or perhaps make people dependent rather than self-reliant. Forgive our hardness of heart, O God. Give us a heart of compassion. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that you are at work every day as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for our salvation and our judgment. Thank you for inviting us to join you in the work of healing and restoration for your sin-sick and misguided world, today and every day. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we gather to praise you for the goodness of life and for the mystery of your love. And we ask you to use this fellowship of praise to restore our faith in the beauty of your creation. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we recognize that sometimes we may be too bold as we pray directly to you, a little bit arrogant in proclaiming the things you have revealed to us. We forget it is only the testimony of others that frees and empowers us to call upon you directly; only the work of Jesus and his church that shows us who you are and what you would have us to do. Forgive us, God. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION) (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for revealing yourself to us through the testimony of people who know you, through the mighty works of Jesus, and the useful service of his church, through the witness of the Scriptures, and through the liberating movement of your Spirit among us. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

We praise you, O God, for the great cloud of witnesses that have preceded us, and for the written record of your dealings with them. Let your Spirit of light shine among us today, so that we may rightly interpret the message that you have for us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are too quick to embrace completely or to reject out of hand every teaching or idea that is new to us, thus failing to distinguish the true and useful parts from the false or questionable aspects of any thought or insight that we have not yet examined or tested. Forgive our haste, O God. Give us the grace to take time and thought for careful examination and discernment. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the courage of Jesus and for any of his present-day disciples whose truth compels us to reexamine our conventional wisdom and our comfortable assumptions about the meaning of your words in Scripture. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us through this fellowship of prayer, praise, and proclamation to get back in touch with each other and with you and with our own true selves. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, O God, when we get so caught up in teachings about you that we forget about our relationship with the only person in whom we know you first hand: Jesus, your Son and our savior. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, Lord, for the loving witness of other people, which enables us to embrace things that we cannot explain. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, send your Holy Spirit among us today so that in this fellowship of love and witness, our minds and hearts may be opened to the understanding of your words in Scripture. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, O God, when, like religious people everywhere, we jump to wrong conclusions about the meaning of Jesus' words concerning himself and us, and concerning his destination and ours with you, our common Father. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the many contemporaries of Jesus who, believed in him because of his words. Thank you for the gift of faith that joins us with all believers everywhere in every age. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, EPIPHANY 9 (LAST), JOHN 8:31-47

(Skip to this for the last Sunday before Lent

when Epiphany has fewer than 9 Sundays.)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we praise you for the gift of your Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. Give us grace to continue in his word so that we might know the truth and be set free for your service under his discipline. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we cling to familiar habits and traditions that are consistent with the facts as we know them; and, so, we are not free to respond in truth when facts and the needs of people are changing. Forgive us, God. Renew and strengthen our knowledge of him who is the way, the truth, and the life. Set us free under his discipline. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God for the tradition that teaches us to value our knowledge of Christ more highly than we value the tradition that introduced us to the knowledge of Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ, the light of our lives. Amen.

YEAR 4, LENT 1, JOHN 3:9-15

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, who sent your son to walk in this earthly way with us, help us now, especially through this Lenten season, to walk his earthly journey with him, and be restored to the new life of resurrection faith. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that sometimes we have talked too easily about spiritual rebirth, as if there were some way to do this without spiritual death and resurrection. Forgive our casual talk and teach us how to die again, and again, and again, so that we may be born again, and again, and again... We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for Christ descending into our world and being lifted up on the cross, that we might be drawn to him, die with him, and rise with him. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, this morning we once again ask you to come into our hearts by your Word and your Spirit. Rescue us from death, for we have been perishing in the inner spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, you did not come to judge us, but to seek and to save those who are lost, to set free those who are imprisoned in guilt and fear, and to rescue us from despair. Take us as we are, with all our sinful past in this world. You are greater than our heart and greater than all our guilt. You are the creator of a new future for us. You are a God of love forever and ever. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for sending your Son to rescue us from the self-defeat of hopeless thinking; and from self-destructive practices such as the compulsive use of tobacco, alcohol, other drugs, sex, gambling, and food. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to recognize and receive your gift this morning, so that we may drink of your Spirit, the fountain of living water, and no longer spend ourselves for that which does not give life to our own inner spirits. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we humbly confess that we have forsaken you, the fountain of living water. We have gone after other gods. We have built great reservoirs, leaky ones that can hold no water. Forgive us, O God, and give us the water that can restore our souls. We pray through Christ our Lord.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the precious gift of water, which sustains the life of this planet. And thank you for Jesus, the precious fountain of living water, the water that restores and sustains our souls and our life together in the Christian fellowship. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we gather in this beautiful place, so well-appointed for your worship and the fellowship of your people, to truly worship you in spirit, you who have created everything and are in everything. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that much of our life is a restless search, wasted energy, and a thrashing about. We are forced to recognize this every time we encounter Jesus the Christ. Forgive us and help us to stay focused on Christ and to realize that the One who is the end of our search has found us. We pray through Christ our Lord, Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for being present in everything, in all places and at all times. Thank you also for being present in religion to remind us of your presence in everything. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, we pray that by the power of your Word and Spirit, we may be restored to a clear vision of what Jesus has done in our lives and of what we called to do as we join our work to his work. And help us also to be conformed once again to his gentle spirit and kindly bearing as we do the work of ministry. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We enjoy the beautiful traditions and monuments that surround us today, O God. They express the faith of our ancestors, and the fellowship they had with you. But we confess that as we admire the beautiful artifacts and appointments of our spiritual heritage, we are often blind and insensible to your presence and action in our life and world today. Forgive us, God. Open our eyes and awaken all of our senses to your presence and action in the life and world of now. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for the renewal of life and the strength that come whenever we seek your will and do it. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, since we have joined in the festive spirit of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, may we also walk with him in the spirit of surrender on the way to the cross. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that the word of the cross has become so familiar that we are all too glib in embracing this difficult gospel. When we think about it we take offense at the idea that the one who came to liberate us should be lifted up on a cross. Our minds are darkened. Give us your spirit of faith and trust to walk in his light so that we may be children of light. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the voice from heaven that comes to us by the power of your Word and Spirit in the midst of this fellowship. Thank you for the miracle that we are drawn to you and that your name is glorified in the lifting up of the cross of Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, EASTER, JOHN 20:1-10

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, grant that as we encounter the risen Christ this morning in the Scriptures, the preaching, and through our fellowship around the Lord's Table, we may also find in the prayers, the hymns, and the anthems a human response what rolls away the stone covering of our hearts. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess that the flow of new life gets swallowed up in the tombs of death that we keep hidden deep inside ourselves. Forgive us, God, and help us to shrink these black holes of the spirit by embracing the grace of your forgiveness once again and by using the will and discipline that come with that grace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, thank you for your Word and your Spirit, through which we encounter Jesus as the risen and present Lord of our lives. Thank you for the Easter gift of renewed hope and joy in resurrection living. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

God, you gave the Apostle Thomas an extraordinary experience to open his eyes of faith. We ask you to favor us today with an extraordinary awareness of your Word and your Spirit in this special time of worship and fellowship, so that we may have eyes of faith to see you in the ordinary experiences of our daily lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Sometimes, Lord, we are busy Mary's, so sure about what your work is that we wonder why other people don't see it and do it as we do. At other times we are doubting Thomases, unable to go forward in trust, requiring reasons and proofs at every step. Forgive us this wasteful bumping of the banks and help us learn the useful skill of plying the main channel. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for your resurrection appearances to the disciples during those first forty days, and also for your resurrection presence in the church fellowship, your body, today. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, the air around us vibrates with a cacophony of many sounds and voices, calling us to various attractions and prospects. Help us who are sheep of your fold, to learn and know the voice of our true Shepherd, Jesus the Christ, so that in the midst of this din we may recognize his call and follow him through each day of our lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty and most merciful Father; we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Common Prayer*, 1945 ed. p. 6 adapted and abbreviated)

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for giving us Jesus to be our loving shepherd, and for giving us your Spirit to open our ears to the shepherd's voice and to make us eager to follow and please him. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we pray that today, by the power of your Word and Spirit, we may be restored to a true sense of your glory as the creator of our life as human beings. And may we get a renewed sense of our purpose in life, and, so, glorify you by accepting our particular lot in life and by doing faithfully whatever work you have set before us by way of our unique circumstance. Help us to accept and believe that by doing our duty, we shall surely shine, and, so, glorify you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, Lord! We don't really expect our lives to have that beautiful and shining quality which you gave us in the beginning. Forgive us this chronic low expectation, and help us to glorify you by expecting you to restore the glory of your creation in us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for you are gracious. You have loved us from the beginning of time and you have remembered us when we were in trouble. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, we have come together to honor you and also to seek help and guidance for our daily lives. Restore us in unity as your peculiar and set-apart people, so that we may disperse into the world with a clear and renewed sense of our mission and of having been sent by you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, Lord, We have neglected the priesthood of believers. We have failed to pray specifically for each other as we ought. Forgive us for shirking our priestly duties. Help us to follow the lead of Christ our great high priest, who intercedes for us continually. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, that we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, Jesus of Nazareth, your Son. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and gracious God: with one ear and one voice we praise you; for in Jesus Christ, you joined us to yourself and you share with us your reconciling love through the preaching and hearing of your Word. May we be renewed in that love and unity today and go forth as agents of your peace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are slow to consider, O Lord, when we disagree with other Christians, that it may be we rather than they who have lost touch with the mind of Christ. Forgive us and restore in us the mind of him who came in the form of a servant. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that Jesus is always praying to you in our behalf, that he prays for us to be united as a people in union with him and you. And thank you for all the signs of a growing oneness of spirit among Christians of many traditions and divisions. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

YEAR 4, EASTER 7, JOHN 13:36 – 14:4

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, even though we thrash about frantically trying to decide which way to go and what to do, we know in our deepest being that we must wait for your leading. Help us to be still and quiet during these moments of worship this morning. Come to us and take us to yourself, so that we may think as you would have us think, and decide as you would have us decide, and do as you would have us do. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We would follow you, Lord, but not if it means denying ourselves. We would be saved, but not by losing our lives for your sake. We would confess your name, but preferably only in church, where it is all right to talk about you, where no one will make us feel ashamed. Lord, forgive our obsession with propriety, our cowardice, our selfishness, our social correctness. Take possession of us. Renew us, in spite of ourselves. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, that while we are not able to follow Jesus along his path of suffering and sacrifice, he comes to us and takes us to himself, so that where he is, we may be also. Thank you that through our baptism, you have included us with Christ in his death and resurrection. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

God our Father, you granted the request of your Son to send us another Counselor to be with us for strength and guidance. May we be opened up to his presence and help in a new way today; our lonely independence and resistance being broken down by his presence in this worshiping community. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We profess to love you, O God, but fail to keep your commandments, and thereby reject the help of your Spirit. Forgive us by your grace and restore our intention for obedience, so that, with the help of your Spirit, we may please you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for coming to live with us for a little while in Jesus of Nazareth, and for coming in your Holy Spirit to be with us forever. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

b. Dismissal Charges

[¶1] Some liturgical traditions have the final blessing of the service prefaced with a dismissal or missionary charge to the people that begins with words such as “Go out into the world in peace for you have a mission” or “Go in peace. You have a Mission” followed by a charge paraphrased from Scriptural themes, such as “Live as free people, serve the Lord rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit” (1 Peter 2:16) or “Have courage; hold on to what is good; return no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak, and help the suffering; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Timothy 2:1; Eph. 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:13-22; 1 Peter 2:17), and concluding with a blessing such as “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:13) or “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord be kind and gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). Other suggested dismissal charges to the people and final blessings can be found in various worship resources and liturgical prayer books. The practice described here puts the missionary charge and the final blessing in the reverse order to that prescribed in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (1975) Articles 57, 124 in Hoffman 1991, 62, 70-71. Jungman 1959, 129, discusses the cultural origins of the dismissal.

[¶2] Sometimes a preacher/worship leader may be moved to develop a specific missionary charge based on the principal Scripture passage and the sermon of the day. These will have maximum freshness and relevance if composed by the preacher of the day after she knows how the sermon is developing and where it is headed. Here are three examples from Advent in Year 1 of *The Open Bible Lectionary* in which the Gospel lections are the same as in Year A of *The Revised Common Lectionary*.

YEAR 1, ADVENT 1, MATTHEW 24:36-44

DISMISSAL

Go out into the world in peace, for you have a mission. Let today and everyday be the day of Christ's coming again into your heart so that you might live freely, joyfully, and obediently.

YEAR 1, ADVENT 2, MATTHEW 3:1-12

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. You have a mission. Bear fruit that befits repentance. Turn around and start living in a way that helps people open up to God's love coming into their lives. (See Matthew 3:3-8)

YEAR 1, ADVENT 3, MATTHEW 11:2-11

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. You have a mission. Go and tell what you hear and see: people are getting a new vision of life, emotional cripples are moving again, castaways are received into community, people are hearing God's Word and getting new life, and it's all good news for the poor. (See Matthew 11:4-5)

YEAR 1, ADVENT 4, MATTHEW 1:18-25

DISMISSAL

Go out into the world in peace, for you have a mission. Tell everyone about the birth of Jesus, whose name means salvation, which is restoration and healing for a broken and sin-sick world, and rescue for people who have lost their way. Tell people that Jesus is also called Emmanuel, which is Hebrew for "God is with us."

c. Epistle Selections as Second Readings

[¶1] *The Revised Common Lectionary* follows the Roman *Lectionary for Mass* in having second readings selected from the Epistles and other New Testament books (Acts, Revelation) either as paired readings meant to illuminate the principal reading from a Gospel or in semi-continuous courses on a major portion of one of the Epistles or other New Testament book. (Henceforward, Acts and Revelation are sometimes subsumed in the term Epistles.) *The Open Bible Lectionary* does not provide such second readings for the Gospel/Christological half-years because it is envisioned that the Epistles will be treated during the summer months as principal *lectio continua de scriptura* liturgical reading courses to be expounded in preaching. Rather, as explained in Book II, Introduction, d. Features of *The Open Bible Lectionary*, item 5, the only suggested paired reading for the principal Gospel lection is one from the Old Testament.

[¶2] But, of course, there are multiple purposes, values, and intentions in the system of second readings from the Epistles that is common to the three-year lectionaries. For example, Lischer 2001, 25, writing about the New Testament proclamation of the resurrection, notes that “The Epistles preceded the written Gospels, and the church continues to hold the stories of Jesus in balance with Paul’s more direct proclamation and application of the kerygma.” Thus there may be some worship planners and preachers who could not get comfortable with a Sunday worship service that doesn’t have an Epistle reading to complete the quire with the Gospel, Old Testament, and Psalm. And so, it is suggested that they might adapt the *Open Bible Lectionary*’s Gospel/Christological half-years by incorporating Epistle readings of *The Revised Common Lectionary*, or its Roman antecedent from the year on the corresponding Gospel for the years on Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and recycle the Epistle readings of the year on Mark with the years on John. This schedule of Epistle readings would correspond very well with the overall themes of

the liturgical seasons and days even though the pairings with the Gospel readings would not have a precise correspondence in some cases, which is already true to some extent with each of the three-year lectionaries.

[¶3] Another approach would be for the preacher to select a complementary Epistle reading based on the direction of her sermon on the Gospel lection. Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 13, have noted that the synagogues over the world of post-exilic Israel were united in the scheduled reading of the entire pentateuchal Torah in a 3-year course, but the complementary readings from the Prophets or the Writings were selected from Sabbath to Sabbath by the leader of each synagogue. Whether the Epistle lections as second readings are selected by the preacher/worship planner or adopted from an established lectionary, the selections will always reflect some theological or hermeneutic or literary or liturgical tendency on the part of the selector or selecting council. For example, Thompson 1971, 100, reports that Luther thought the lectionary he received needed revising because some friend of “works righteousness” had obviously arranged the Epistle lections. Thompson 1971, 109-110, discusses Luther’s hopes for the selection by enlightened people of the best and weightier parts of the Epistles and Gospels at such time as the lectionary may be revised, whenever Christ grants that the Mass be celebrated in the vernacular.

PART II

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

TO

LAST SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT

CHAPTER IV - JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST:

***A LECTIO CONTINUA DE SCRIPTURA* SERIES:**

PRINCIPAL READINGS FROM AN EPISTLE, ACTS, OR REVELATION

EXAMPLE:

A COMPREHENSIVE AND CONTINUOUS SERIES OF LECTIONS IN PAUL’S LETTER TO THE

ROMANS

WITH SUGGESTED PAIRED READINGS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

AND WITH SUGGESTED LITURGICAL PRAYERS KEYED TO THE ROMANS LLECTIONS

The summer months following Pentecost Sunday can be used very well for a recurring *lectio continua de scriptura* series on a New Testament book other than one of the Gospels. The series can be suspended around the end of August to give way to a 3-month *lectio continua de*

scriptura series on a book of the Old Testament. Each of these series would be resumed at the same season each year until completed. After that, other books of the New and Old Testaments could be the basis of summer and fall *lectio continua de scriptura* series.

Suggested companion readings from the Old Testament have been provided for a series on Romans. The word suggested is used to indicate that the preacher would do well to consider selecting a different Old Testament reading when she sees how her expository sermon on the Romans passage is shaping up. The commentaries on Romans can be a helpful guide for this purpose. Nelson 1982, Nocent 1977, Bonneau 1998, West 1997 and others have discussed how the hermeneutical trajectories of sermon development are shaped by the lectionary pairs and sets of companion texts per Sunday, and how that can sometimes get in the way of focused exposition of the principal text of the day. I have discussed that matter in Book II, Introduction, d. Features of *The Open Bible Lectionary*, Item 5, and in n. 18 and n. 19.

I discussed, in Chapter III, perspectives on the form, function, and usage of the three exemplar liturgical prayers keyed to each principal lection. The same perspectives apply to the collection of example prayers that follow here. As I indicated in Chapter III, the preacher may be moved during sermon development to edit the respective prayers suggested here, or to draft new ones.

Companion readings from the four Gospels have *not* been suggested for this series on Romans. The Epistles are, after all, the church's earliest written "gospels" and are not dependent on the later four memoirs of the life and ministry of Jesus for the core message of salvation in Christ. I discussed, in Book I, Chapter I, the problem of making the Gospels a "canon within the canon" in the traditional lectionaries that always have a Gospel reading as the principal lection of the day. Those worship planners and preachers whose liturgical theology and culture require a

Gospel reading for each service may select a Gospel reading that makes a good companion for the principal reading in Romans or may simply use the Gospel lection of the day in one of the three-year lectionaries. In addition, one could check Index II in *The Revised Common Lectionary*, where all the Romans passages in the three years are listed in canonical order, to see with which Gospel and Old Testament lections each Romans passage is assigned.

Especial attention to the opportunities and possibilities of preaching from a text in an Epistle is given in Long 1989, 107-126. Suggested liturgical prayers keyed to readings from Romans, along with suggested Old Testament companion readings, follow here.

ROMANS 1:1-17

(Habakkuk 2:1-4)

OPENING PRAYER

First, we thank our God through Jesus Christ for each other in this congregation, our family of faith. May we without ceasing always remember each other in our prayers. Help us to listen together for the word that you have for us today, as we begin our journey through that section of your Holy Word that is contained in Paul's Letter to the Christians at Rome. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we have often lived as if we were ashamed of the gospel, as if we did not know that the word of Christ is your power for salvation to all people. Help us to receive your grace of apostleship anew today and to be possessed by the fact that we, like Paul, are sent out to proclaim the good news. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the good news in the cross of Christ, your power at work within us for our healing. Thank you for the grace of apostleship, the gift of a purpose driven life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 1:18-32

(Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-17)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we praise you for the good news of your salvation in the life, death and resurrection of your Son our Lord, Jesus the Christ. Help us, by the gift of healing in him, to see how you have revealed your purposes in the world of your creation as it is. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, how nimbly we exercise our minds to deny the plain truth that you have put in front of us. This happens especially when the truth interferes with our habits and drives of self-gratification in disregard of the feelings and the health of others. Please forgive us and help us to change our thinking and our behavior. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for signs of your wrath and anger, the hurt and suffering that call attention to our blindness and disobedience. And thank you for the signs of your love and grace, the healing and forgiveness that make us free and strong to change our minds, to open our eyes, to see your truth in the world as it is, and to obey your word. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 2:1-29

(Job 34:10-20)

OPENING PRAYER

We worship and praise you, O God, because you have called us to be your distinctive people, set apart to live differently from the self-serving ways of this fallen world. Help us today as we pray to you and attend to your word, to discern where we have blurred this distinction. And help us to see what corrective measures you would have us take. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

It is so much easier to recognize the sin and foolishness of those who are not religious, O God, than it is our own who are faithful, law-abiding church people. Forgive us, God, and help us to see ourselves as equally in need of your mercy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for reminding us in your Word that we in the community of faith are just as much in need of repentance and forgiveness as those who are on the outside. And thank you for giving us the mission of sharing this word of grace and discipline with each other and with our neighbors in the wider world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 3:1-20

(Job 9:1-24)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be refreshed today with the joy of believing and a sense of your presence.

And help us to keep in mind from day to day that it is not our faith that saves us but rather the gift of salvation that makes us faithful. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Sometimes, O God, the prayer of the Pharisee is on the tip of our tongues, thankful that we are not like those whose offenses are more gross than ours. Forgive us, Lord, for we are just as lost in sin as anyone, totally dependent upon your mercy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the supreme joy of traveling with you and your disciples on the journey of life, even if we have no eternal advantage over people who are not part of this caravan. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 3:21-26

(Exodus 25:10-22)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us today, O God, to rediscover a sense of Jesus Christ as a real presence in our lives, not only as the one who died once for all, but also as a place where we can go from day to day and moment to moment to receive a fresh supply of your mercy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

It is easy enough to proclaim your stern righteousness, O God, when we have the faults and weaknesses of other people in mind. But this does make it hard for us to claim your generous mercy when it comes to our own shortcomings and offenses. God, forgive us, and help us to see ourselves and others more clearly. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the mercy seat, the gift of rescue, healing and forgiveness that we have in Christ Jesus. Thank you that we have continual access to that place of atonement through the power and freedom of your Word and Spirit. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 3:27-31

(Habakkuk 2:1-4)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you, the risen and exalted one who sits above the heavens at the right hand of God and who also dwells among us and lives within our hearts of faith. Open our minds today, to comprehend the wideness of your mercy and be restored to lives of thankful obedience. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, to sometimes working frantically, as if we could save ourselves, and to sometimes avoiding responsibility and hoarding resources, as if we had not received your gifts of healing and wholeness. God, forgive us and let us be renewed in your gifts of freedom and strength to live thankful and obedient lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the gift of faith to believe your love, and the opportunity of service to show your love. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 3:31 – 4:8

(Genesis 15:1-6, 22:1-19)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to find strength and direction for our lives, as we remember great heroes of faith who have answered your call, trusted your word, followed your lead, and found wholeness and peace in your presence. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that it is hard for us to stop talking after saying the good words of your grace and love. We feel compelled to muddle good news by going on with the “yes but” words of judgment and demand. Our minds keep slipping back into faithless ideas about faith. Forgive us, God. Help us by the power of your Word and Spirit to trust the corrective power of your love. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the witness of Abraham, who served you in a covenant of faith, long before you gave the covenant of law through Moses. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 4:9-12

(Genesis 17:9-14)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we pray that you will send your Holy Spirit among us to open our hearts and prepare our minds to receive the guidance that you have for us, as we gather in praise and prayer around the reading and preaching of your words of scripture. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, we humbly confess that our promise to be students who follow in your way has sometimes been taken lightly and sometimes completely forgotten. We seem to accumulate extra baggage and take up the teachings and ways of other masters. Forgive us, God. Give us strength and freedom to cut off those spiritual appendages that drag us down and divert us from your Way. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the inclusive sweep of your great blessing of forgiveness. Thank you for the good news that Christ died for overly confident religious folks like us and also for people who are still outside of the family of faith. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 4:13-17

(Genesis 17:1-8)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us with our faith and our doubt today. Grant that by the power of your Word and your Spirit, we may be restored to a basic stance of trust in your promises, so that we might once again have an everyday attitude of hopefulness rather than desperation, believing that you, O God, will always do as you have promised. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, how easily we lapse into frantic preoccupation with the law given through Moses, the law that convicts us; forgetting about the promise and faith given through Abraham long before Moses' time, the kind of faith that saves us through Christ. Forgive us and restore to us the gifts of faith and trust in you and your promises. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the promise to Abraham, which makes it clear that your gifts and promises are for all people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 4:18-25

(Genesis 15:1-6)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, to find once again a real sense of contentment and hope in life, by believing in you and your promises, and that you can and will do for us as you have promised. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, that desperate and lonely passages in our lives make you seem cold and far away, for a while. But then we are driven back upon you as our only hope. Forgive our doubt and our wavering. Help us to get through the desert places. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for Abraham who believed your impossible promise. Help us to believe that you are present with us, especially when we feel alone and you seem far away. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 5:1-5

(Isaiah 48:17-19; Jeremiah 9:23-24)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, our God, we have gathered to praise you for the gift of faith that puts our life on the right track in relation to you, our creator. Refresh us in that faith today, so that we may exult in the hope of sharing your glory at the last, and also find our present sufferings to be redemptive. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We strive for peace and happiness through our own achievements, through our possessions and through our associations. Forgive us, O God, and help us to find in you our only source of true peace and joy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the gift of being put right with you through the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, and for the gift of faith to embrace this salvation, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit who pours your love into our hearts. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 5:6-11

(Isaiah 53:4-6)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God to accept the limitations of our lot in life and our place in the world, so that we can overcome the nearby obstacles from day to day and have the joy of living victoriously. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that sometimes our words and actions are those of your enemies, and some of our questions to you and about you betray a failure to think of you as truly God, the creator of the world and the source of our existence. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to speak and act as your friends once again. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the power of Jesus' death, to neutralize our misdirected anger toward you and toward the world and toward ourselves, and to change us from your enemies to your friends. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 5:12-14

(Genesis 3:1-7)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get a renewed sense of our common lot with all human beings, descendants of Adam who led us all into revolt against you; yet sisters and brothers of Christ, who leads us all into peace and reconciliation with you our creator. We pray through Christ our redeemer. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, we readily admit that we have been wrong in many instances, sinners that we all are. But, O, how hard it is to admit our error in specific matters that are still current! Forgive our stubborn rebellion and give us the grace to admit particular mistakes in “real time.” We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the witness of Paul the Apostle, who assures us that we are not alone in puzzling over life’s persistent questions, and for the clarity that comes in knowing that our rebellious nature is the common heritage of all people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 5:15-17

(Genesis 3:8-13)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get a renewed sense of your abounding grace, the free gift that enables us to experience a world of goodness in the midst of a world of evil and hurting. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Sometimes we deny that we have any part in the world of Adam, the world of rebellion against you, O Lord. Other times we pretend ignorance of the world of Christ, the world of goodness, blessings and communion with you, our God. God, forgive us and help us to recognize and acknowledge our part in both worlds. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the “much more” of your abundant grace, which is more than sufficient to dissolve our rebellion. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 5:18-21

(Exodus 20:1-17)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to find new strength and courage in this human fellowship, a community of people who have fallen down like all the descendants of Adam and who are being lifted up by your grace along with all the followers of Christ. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We welcome your law as true and good, O God. But your law reveals and magnifies our shortcomings and transgressions, which we are reluctant to face. Forgive our failings and our reluctance to face them. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the gift of your law that makes us aware of the domination of sin in our lives. And thank you for your grace that abounds in response to our sin, and restores us to right living in your sight, and to the hope of life eternal. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ, the light of our lives. Amen.

ROMANS 6:1-4

(John 1:17 – 2:10)

OPENING PRAYER

Make us your captives, Lord, and then we shall be free. Help us to recognize our freedom in your grace, and we shall be your faithful servants. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

When it comes right down to it, Lord, we must admit that we have serious misgivings about your amazing gift of unconditional forgiveness. What if some people take unfair advantage and accept your forgiveness but do not respond with thankful obedience? Forgive us, O God, for underestimating the life-changing power of your grace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, we thank you that we have passed through the waters of baptism. “We have passed through the waters, and that’s all that matters! We have passed through the waters! O thanks be to God.” (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 6:5-11

(Genesis 3:14-19)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, we ask you to help us during this hour, by the power of your Word and Spirit, to get a better understanding of what it means for us who are living in this earthly realm of sin and death to also live as people who have been set free from the power of sin by your grace in Jesus the Christ. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We've had a lot of practice at excusing our own hurtful and self-defeating habits, O God, saying we can't help it, denying the freedom and strength that we have received in our spiritual death and resurrection with Christ. Forgive our self-deceptions, and help us to come clean and change our ways of being, thinking, and acting. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for our dying with Christ which sets us free from our old rebellion, and for our rising with Christ which makes us free for our new obedience. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 6:12-14

(Genesis 5:11-13)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, we are very familiar with the word of good news that we are no longer under law but under grace. Help us to get a better understanding of what this means in our daily lives where it seems that we are always beckoned to put ourselves at the disposal of hurtful and destructive ways, the ways of sin. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How easily we dismiss our failings, Lord God, claiming to be victims of circumstances. Forgive us and help us to claim the freedom and responsibility that are ours in the new life in Christ. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the freedom and power that we have to put our minds and bodies at your service. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 6:15-19

(Isaiah 1:12-20)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to surrender ourselves in a new way to your leadership and care. Help us to rediscover, through these moments of prayer, praise, and proclamation that our greatest freedom and our greatest power come only when we are your obedient slaves. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How easily we become slaves to the basic drives and hungers of life, O God! And we stubbornly resist the only way of true freedom, which is to become your slaves. God, forgive our obtuseness. Help us to find freedom through surrender. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for our new slavery, the slavery of being in a right and obedient relationship with you. Now, at last, we are truly free. Free at last, free at last! Thank God Almighty! We are free at last! (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 6:20-23

(Exodus 32:1-6)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to know you as our beginning, our guide on the journey, and our destination. Then we can live wisely and freely and joyfully. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We go from self-neglect to self-indulgence and back again, Lord God. Forgive our fickleness and waffling. Help us to be steady in caring for ourselves and for others and for the world in a grace-filled balancing act. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the gift of surrender that sets us free to be willing slaves of a right relationship with you. Thank you for the joy of living lives that are set apart for your purposes, lives that will continue into the great beyond. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 7:1-6

(Amos 5:10-13)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to recover a sense of who we are, persons who have died to our old religious fears and illusions, persons who have been raised up to a new and direct relationship with you through Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray in his name. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How easily we confuse our own religious interest and participation with your living presence and activity, O God. Forgive our presumption and help us to listen and wait for the wind of the Spirit, your Holy Spirit whose breath blows upon us where and when you choose. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for this fellowship in Christ's body the church. Here, we no longer serve in the old way of a written law, but in the new way of the Spirit. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 7:7-13

(Genesis 3:1-7)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to realize how far we are from you, even in the most exciting moments of our church life. And help us through the lively fellowship of this church family to become more open and more ready for your coming nearness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How easily we forget, Lord God, that our knowledge of you came to us through your people, that great cloud of witnesses who handed your word down from one generation to the next. Forgive our absent-mindedness and help us to be faithful witnesses in our time. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We are so thankful for this loving fellowship, O God, and for the gift of your law that makes us aware of our failings. But more especially we thank you for your forgiveness and for your presence in our midst. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 7:14-25

(Genesis 4:1-7)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to recognize the mystery of ourselves, to acknowledge the contradictions within us, and to accept ourselves as we are, people who are completely dependent upon your mercy.

We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We humbly confess, O God, to the demon-like power of sin and rebellion within us, the power that renders us incapable of doing even the good that we really want to do. God, forgive us, and help us to live as people who are completely dependent upon your mercy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, that we are delivered from our sinful self-destruction through our Lord Jesus Christ, even though we continue to be under the power of sin with our flesh, while we practice true religion with our minds. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:1-11

(Isaiah 61:1-4)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, through your Word and through your Spirit, as we gather in fellowship at your Table, to get a renewed sense of living in your Spirit, and a clear vision of what you would have us do with this gift of life in your creation. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, Lord God, that we have centered our lives and hopes on various things, people, and achievements, all of which have failed us in turn. God, forgive us, and help us to get our lives focused again on him who is the center that does not fail. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, that Jesus lived in this world of hurt and confusion, giving us a healing focus for our own lives, a center that does not fail. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:12-17

(Isaiah 42:1-4)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to rediscover the fact that we are “children of choice,” having been adopted by you through the loving sacrifice of our brother, your son, Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that sometimes we become desperate about our lives, forgetting that we have been baptized, rescued and saved, united in death and resurrection with him who also was baptized and claimed by you as your beloved and well pleasing son. God forgive our forgetfulness, fretting about our lives, as if we had not been adopted in love as sisters and brothers of your only begotten son. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for the spirit of adoption in Jesus Christ, our brother through whom we have been reclaimed as your children. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:18-21

(Genesis 3:17-19)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to get a new sense of our human habitat, that part of your great creation called planet earth, as a living organism that is eagerly waiting for us your children to show our respect for this great gift, and to do whatever we can to take good care of this environment. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, each new revelation of the deterioration of our earthly habitat is greeted with a great deal of skepticism and evasion of the unpleasant facts, and a denial of our human responsibility for what is happening. Forgive our resistance, open our eyes, and change our hearts. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the gift of suffering with Christ and being raised up with him into this new life. And thank you for the hope of glory, when we shall share the joy of his brightness completely, and for which we wait in eager longing with your whole creation. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:22-25

(Isaiah 40:27-31, Lamentations 3:22-26)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, grant that in this worship service we may encounter your Word and Spirit, so that our yearning and emptiness may be transformed into a deep sense of our need of you and our complete dependence upon you, and a confident and joyful hope in your promised future completion and fulfillment of all things. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we admit that sometimes we go too far with our optimism and positive thinking, denying or covering up certain problems and deficits that ought to be faced and dealt with. Forgive our deceptive cheeriness and help us to be more responsive in taking action when we can, and more candid in acknowledging our limitations and our need to wait upon you in hope. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the gift of companionship with people who have needs and longings similar to ours. Thank you for the gift of hope that enables us to wait with patience for your final completion of all things. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:26-27

(I Kings 3:5-12)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we seek a meaningful prayer life for ourselves, to find a happy balance and rhythm between prayer that is specific and verbal, and prayer that is unspoken and general. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess, along with Martin Luther, that we tend to pray for things that are too small, lowly, or insignificant in comparison with the great and profound gifts that you want to give. Forgive our timidity, and give us courage and freedom to ask and expect great things of you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for being present with us and for granting our deepest needs when we don't even know what they are. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:28-30

(Deuteronomy 7:6-11)

OPENING PRAYER

Dear loving and gracious Father, you have chosen us to be your people, along with all who hear and believe your Word. Refresh us with your Word and Spirit in this worship service, so that we may go forth with a new sense that our reason for living is because you have called us to life and predestined us to love you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

There is something within us, O God, something that resists the good news about our destiny of finally entering into perfect communion and fellowship with you. Forgive the sin and rebellion within us, so that we may welcome your plans for us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for all the good things that you prepared for us long before our existence, even long before the world began. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 8:31-39

(Isaiah 50:7-9)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, restore us to a sense of our complete dependence upon you for each breath of life, so that we may once again be certain that nothing can ever separate us from your love. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Dear loving and merciful Father, we humbly confess that one of our most persistent sins is our refusal to forgive ourselves even as you so freely forgive us. Help us to accept ourselves in our weaknesses, so that we can regain ourselves in strength, and serve you in faithfulness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for your Son, Jesus Christ, who walks with us through the valleys of life and on the mountaintops of life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 9:1-5

(Genesis 12:1-3)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you who long for the return of your lost and separated children, we worship and adore you because of your loving compassion toward us and toward all people. Fill us with your spirit of compassion, so that we may feel as kindly toward our separated sisters and brothers as you do. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We acknowledge, O God, that we often get absorbed in the survival needs of our beloved church family, forgetting that the church's faithfulness to the gospel is more important than the survival of the church. Forgive us, God, and help us to focus on obedience to your divine will rather than on human success. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for your promises given to Israel, and for your promises given to the church, and for your continuing presence and action in both Israel and the church. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 9:6-13

(Genesis 25:19-34)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get the drift of your process of salvation in human history, a process which is much bigger than the success or failure of our church or our own personal witness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we take for granted your self-revelation through Israel and through Christ, failing to recognize the strangeness of your selective way, the election of Israel and the establishment of the church. Forgive our oblivion, O God, and open our eyes to the beauty of your choice to build your church on faith to be the embodiment of Christ in the world today. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the church of Jesus the Christ, a place of truthfulness, a place where hurt is acknowledged and healing is administered. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 9:14-18

(Exodus 33:17-23)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we worship you as the all-powerful creator of everything. May we also learn to acknowledge your freedom to deal with us as you see fit without giving 'reasons.' We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, we know that you welcome our desire to better understand your ways and who you are. But we also know that sometimes we are too demanding of explanations, forgetting that whatever pleases you is reason enough. Forgive us, O Lord, and give us grace to embrace and honor the mystery of your ways. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for giving us the freedom to make choices. Thank you also for using your own freedom to choose for the healing and salvation for the world in the ways that are most pleasing to you. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 9:19-29

(Jeremiah 18:1-6)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be refreshed in the awareness of you as our creator and ourselves as your creatures. May we find new freedom, strength, and direction to live responsibly under your dominion. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are not content for long, O God, to be the obedient creatures that you made us to be. We always slip back into the basic sin of using our freedom to serve our own purposes. Forgive our lapses, O God, and help us to be more consistent in finding our truest freedom in an attitude of submission to your will. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for calling the Israelites and people of faith from all nations to be your special people in the world, the people of faith, compassion, and reconciliation, a community of healing and rescue for all people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 9:30-33

(Isaiah 8:11-14; 28:16)

OPENING PRAYER

Surprise us, O God, with your grace. Interrupt our busy work, whether worldly achievement or religious self-improvement. Fill us with a joyful sense of your faithfulness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are put off, O God, by good people who show no interest in joining us in our conversation with you; forgetting that you may already be talking with them! Forgive our arrogance, O God, and open our eyes to see what you are doing with people who are ‘outside the camp.’ We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for tripping us up when we get too caught up in what we are doing for you in church and world. Thanks for interrupting our work with the miracle of what you are doing for us. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 10:1-4

(Jeremiah 31:31-34)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us this day, O God, to be refreshed in the sense of Christ within us, and to know that your law is written on our hearts. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have sought after you through church programs and through our own personal discipline of study and prayer, O God; forgetting that you have sought and found us. Forgive us and help us to make our church life and personal devotion a thank offering. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the gift of faith that puts us right with you, and calls us to live lives of thankful obedience. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 10:5-13

(Deuteronomy 30:11-20)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be conscious of your word, which is very near to us, the word of Christ on our lips and in our hearts, the word of faith which we proclaim. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We hanker after sure-fire ways to get Christ back into our church life, our family life, our work life, and our world; forgetting that Christ is already as near as the words on our lips and the prayers in our hearts. Forgive us God. Reopen our eyes and our hearts. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the nearness of your saving Word, Jesus Christ, and for the promise of salvation to all who believe in him and call on his name. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 10:14-21

(Isaiah 52:7-9, 53:1-3)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to hear your word with understanding, so that our hearts may be pierced and our resistance melted, our lives changed and turned around, healed and made whole. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are a disobedient and contrary people, O God. We act as if we had never heard your gospel of grace, as if your word of love did not call us to turn around and go the other way in our home life, our church life, our work life, and our community life. Forgive us, God. Turn us around. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for holding out your hands to us all day long. Thank you for showing yourself to us even when we were not looking for you. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 11:1-10

(Isaiah 10:20-23)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get a renewed sense of your plans for us, and of your faithfulness in completing them, so that our faith may become stronger and we may become more faithful in trusting you and obeying you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How easily we despair, O God, because of the ill fortune of your people, especially our own times of disappointment. Forgive us for doubting your care and provision. Help us to trust in your final plans rather than worry about our interim ups and downs. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS D(AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for preserving a faithful remnant among your people Israel. They were the seed-bed for the planting of Christ's church. And thank you for the remnant of faithfulness that exists even in today's shaky church. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 11:11-24

(Isaiah 56:1-8)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us to recognize, O God, that it is only your grace that makes us and our mostly Gentile church a part of your covenant people. And may we also learn to expect and recognize the gracious inclusion of your earlier people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, God, when we are too comfortable with being part of the good old in-group of our traditional church. Forgive us also when we are so self-assured about our brave enthusiasm for the true and pure gospel as we understand it. Help us to keep mindful of our complete dependence on your grace from moment to moment. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for your conquering grace! You retrieve us from our dead-end thinking, and you save us in spite of ourselves. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 11:25-36

(Isaiah 59:20-21)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to have a due sense of your mercies, and to stand in awe before the mystery of your saving grace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have been complacent about the meaning of Israel in the world today, O God. We have also been indifferent concerning the destiny of those descended from your first covenant people.

Forgive us by your grace and illumine us by your word. We pray through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the miracle and mystery of your mercy, whereby all people have been caught up in disobedience so that all people may experience your love and forgiveness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:1-2

(Isaiah 1:10-17)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, in view of your grace through Jesus Christ, to surrender our whole selves to you once again, so that we may be rescued from the mud bog of legalistic do's and don'ts into which we keep sliding. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are guilty, O God, of the basic sin: reasserting control over our lives. Forgive us, and help us to surrender our whole selves to your service anew this day. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the servant form of Jesus the Christ, and for the gift of surrender, which transforms us and renews our minds, so that we may have the mind of Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:3-5

(Exodus 19:1-6)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by the power of your word and spirit, to have a sense of your presence among the people gathered around your table. Help us to discern the body of Christ in this fellowship, and our individual participation in him. We pray through Christ our redeemer. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, O God, when we get so caught up in our own deciding that we forget to consider your will and the concerns of the fellowship. Give us the grace that we need to always be mindful of the body of which we are individual members. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the word of your presence in the fellowship, the word that punches holes in our inflated sense of individual self-importance. Thank you for restoring us to a sense of the importance of our family of faith. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:6-8

(Genesis 4:10-17)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be aware that all of our gifts and abilities come from you; and give us grace and guidance to recognize the gifts of others, and to use our own capacities in your service. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, God, when we covet gifts and abilities other than those allotted to us by you. Set us free and make us strong and wise to exercise our gifts with grace and effectiveness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the ministry of Jesus, our supreme prophet, priest, and king. And thank you for the gifts and abilities by which we are called to continue his ministry. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:9-13

(Jeremiah 15:15-21)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to have a new awareness of your grace in this loving fellowship. And help us to exhibit your love in our love and respect toward one another, and in our peace-making ways among the peoples of the world, the world that you love so much. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We know that whatever gifts we have from you, O God, are meant to be shared with the community. But we forget that the community itself is a blessing from you, and our gifts have mainly been received through your grace in the fellowship. Please heal our blindness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the joy of being loved and cared for in this family of faith. And thank you for the freedom in Jesus Christ to express our love for you in our affection toward one another and in our life as responsible citizens of your world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:15-16

(Genesis 45:1-3))

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to recover a true awareness of our own limitations; and to be more patient and understanding toward others. Help us to maintain an attitude of dependence upon you, and to trust you, and to be at peace with you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that we get so caught up in our own joys and trials that we do not notice or feel what others are going through. Forgive us and change us through the life of Jesus, who came to share our joys and tribulations. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for Jesus the Christ, who did not regard his equality with you as something the exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:14, 17-21

(Proverbs 25:11-15, 21-23)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to recognize your love for us in the midst of our revolt and rebellion, and so be reconciled to you and filled with your peace. Then, may we learn by your grace to show love and forbearance toward people who are in revolt against us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we have a long way to go to truly love our enemies and show them genuine kindness and understanding. Forgive us, God. Soften our hearts. Help us to take the next steps that we need to take toward blessing those who think ill of us or wish harm to us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that while we were your enemies, we were reconciled through the death of your Son, Jesus the Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 12:21 – 13:7

(Jeremiah 27:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us, by the power of your Word and Spirit, to learn the art of channeling our enthusiasm for your love and mercy in ways that are responsive to the legitimate traditions and needs of the human community. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How conveniently we have organized our lives into separate compartments, O God, forgetting that all things are yours. Forgive us, God. Help us to be good stewards in every area of life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the gift of life, and for the freedom and responsibility to govern ourselves and take care of your good creation. Thank you for the gift of law and order! (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 13:7-10

(Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, rescue us once again from thinking in terms of rules and regulations when it comes to how we should treat our neighbors. Help us to think in terms of doing love toward each person whom we meet. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, there are some people in this world who are really hard to love. Not only that, we are not all that consistent about showing love to the ones who are fairly easy to love. God, forgive us. Help us to love with your love, both the loveable and the unlovely. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for proving your love for us, in that while we still were sinners, Christ died for us. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 13:11-14

(Isaiah 1:1-5)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get free of focusing our lives so exclusively around past events and present demands. May we truly put our trust in your promises for a future fulfillment. Help us to wait and work as people whose final destiny is assured in Jesus Christ. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, Lord, when we work frantically, as if the future depended on us and not you. Forgive us also when we work slovenly, forgetting that your promises for the future can only inspire us to more vigorous obedience and service in the present. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the good news of the gospel, for the strength and comfort of your presence in the Spirit, and for the bright and shining hope of Christ's coming again. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 14:1-12

(Daniel 1:8-17)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to a new awareness of you as the one who judges and forgives us all. May we let go of our strong tendency to judge each other. Make us free, once more to receive one another as we are. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have worried too much, O God, about differences between our religious style and customs and those of other Christians. God, forgive us. Help us to focus on our unity of essential beliefs and practices. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the gift in Jesus Christ to accept people who are different from us, and to trust them and ourselves to your mercy and judgment. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 14:13-23

(Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to have the mind of Christ, and so surrender our wills, that we may never insist on our own way, but resolve not to put a stumbling block in the path of a sister or brother. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Sometimes we may trumpet the freedom we have in Christ in a way that is hurtful to someone who is still sensitive about certain religious customs. May God forgive and restore us in the freedom of Christ's compassion. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the joy, the comfort, and the challenge of Christian discipleship through the life and mission of this our church family. We ask you to accept our discipleship intentions and to give us your blessing as we rededicate ourselves to your service. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 15:1-6

(Isaiah 50:4-6)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to persist in the study of your word, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We are quite ready to put the interests of others ahead of our own desires, as a matter of general principle. But when it comes to specific situations, we usually end up asserting our own preferences, as a matter of general practice. God, forgive us. Help us to learn from Jesus the art of true surrender. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the sound advice of the Apostle Paul about pleasing others and not ourselves. And thank you for the example of Jesus Christ, who inspires Paul and us with his example of surrender and sacrifice, even accepting the insults intended for evildoers. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 15:7-13

(Leviticus 19:33-34)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to be more open and welcoming toward one another within this fellowship of faith, different as our backgrounds and histories may be. May we be a true light among all the peoples of the world, so that the nations may have hope and may come to rejoice with us in Jesus and to sing your praise. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that we continue to distance ourselves from people of other religions, other cultures, and even other expressions of Christian faith. Forgive, and help us to praise you in fellowship with people of all nations. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

God, we thank you for the open invitation that makes it possible for “strangers” like us to be included in your special people. And thank you for gently reminding us to keep the doors open and to be your inclusive and welcoming family. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 15:14-22

(Isaiah 52:7-15)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to be inspired with your Word and Spirit, that we might have boldness to speak of you with one another, to the end that we may all be mutually corrected, and may know how to make our lives an acceptable offering to you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We forget, O God, that those who truly teach your Word have received their gift and task from you. Forgive us for thinking them too boastful or self-assured when they are offering us the Good News by your grace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you God for teachers of your truth who follow Paul's example, confident in their knowledge of the message from you, yet wise and humble enough to recognize and affirm the knowledge and good motives of students like us. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 15:23-33

(Isaiah 66:10-13, 18-21)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as we reflect on the active plans and career of your great missionary apostle to get a clear vision of what plans you have for us and how you would have us to work and plan to fulfill your purposes. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that our plans for future travels and activities are not always focused on the mission you have given us and the life you would have us live. Forgive us, God. Help us to shift our focus and find our true joy and fulfillment in planning and doing that which you have sent us to do. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for Paul's vision of a life of witness to your work of redemption in Jesus Christ. And thank you for the gift of freedom to choose your way and to live our lives as people who are sent into the world on a mission. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ROMANS 16:1-27

(Genesis 49:1-28)

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes by the light your Holy Spirit, O God. Make us aware of your presence in the Christian community, your Church, Christ's body in this place. May we learn how to mention each other by name with the same fond affection that Paul expressed when sending final greetings to the church in Rome. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, sometimes we tend to associate peoples' names with their pesky quirks rather than their unique attractiveness and worth. God, forgive us. Change our minds and hearts so that we are predisposed to see the good in others and to reflect to them the affirmation and appreciation that express the love we are receiving from you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the precious memories and fond personal affections that are not merely a bonus blessing or a by-product of being part of a harmonious church family, but are actually part and parcel of the heart and core of what it means to be a believer in Christ and a disciple of his. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER V – SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER

***A LECTIO CONTINUA DE SCRIPTURA* SERIES: PRINCIPLE READINGS FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT BOOK**

EXAMPLE:

**A COMPREHENSIVE AND CONTINUOUS SERIES OF
LECTIONS IN THE BOOK OF**

GENESIS

**WITH SUGGESTED PAIRED READINGS FROM
THE NEW TESTAMENT**

**AND WITH SUGGESTED LITURGICAL PRAYERS
KEYED TO THE GENESIS LECTIONS**

The fall months from the first of September to the last Sunday before Advent can be used for a recurring *lectio continua de scriptura* series on an Old Testament book. The series could be resumed at the same season each year until completed. After that, other books of the Old Testament could be

the basis of fall *lectio continua de scriptura* series. Ritschl 1963, 166-174, discusses some approaches and cautions about preaching from Old Testament passages, including Christology, typology, and the theme of promise and fulfillment. Von Allmen 1962, 25-26, and Brueggemann 2003 also discuss preaching from the Old Testament.

This example of a series on the book of Genesis provides a *suggested* paired reading from the New Testament for each Sunday, sometimes from a Gospel and sometimes from one of the Epistles or from Acts or Revelation. The word suggested allows that preachers might wish to make a different selection as they consult the commentaries on Genesis and see what direction their own expository sermons are taking. I discussed in Chapter IV in my introduction to suggested liturgical prayers keyed to the Romans lections the problem of hermeneutical trajectories in sermon development being shaped by fixed lectionary pairs and sets. Worship planners and preachers who need to have both a Gospel reading and an Epistle reading at each service may complete the set by selecting Gospel or Epistle readings that are thematic correlates to the Genesis reading or by reference to the readings of the day in one of the three-year lectionaries. In addition to the commentaries on Genesis, help in finding just the right companion readings can sometimes be had by reference to Index II in *The Revised Common Lectionary* (1992) in which the 31 uses of readings from Genesis are listed in canonical order with the Sunday on the liturgical calendar indicated, where one can find companion readings from a Gospel and an Epistle. Ritschl 1963, 172-174, has a caution about hazards in pairing a New Testament text with an Old Testament text *in order to make the Old Testament text preach the gospel!*

I discussed, in Chapter III, perspectives on the usage and possible editing of the three exemplar liturgical prayers keyed to each principal lection. The same perspectives apply to the collection of example prayers that follow here.

GENESIS 1:1-2

(Romans 8:18-25)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, open our eyes with spiritual vision. Help us by the aid of your Word and your Spirit to see your order in the midst of the world's disorder. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God, we sometimes despair over the chaos, violence, destruction, and danger that are so wide spread in the world of humankind today. Yet we know that you are the Creator who turns chaos and danger into order and safety. Forgive our desperation and let your Spirit of hope and new beginnings sweep over us today. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the promise and hope of Creation, that the chaos and confusion in our life and world today are just the stuff out of which you are able to make order and goodness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:3-5, 14-19

(Revelation 22:6-21)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you who created the sun and moon to illumine this dark world, illumine our dark minds with your Word and Spirit, so that we may see light truly. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, sometimes we are guilty of thinking that you have sent us out to meet an unknown destiny, forgetting that you are our future, and you are always there before us to welcome us. Forgive us and open our eyes to the good you have planned for us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for revealing yourself to us as our origin and our destination. And thank you for walking with us on our journey of life from beginning to end. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:11-13

(John 1:1-3)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, whose voice called upon the earth to put forth plants yielding seeds and fruitful trees of every kind; plant the seed of your Word in our hearts anew this day, so that our lives may become more truly the fruit of your Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, sometimes we forget that we are creatures and not little gods. But we also forget that you care for all of your creatures, including us. Forgive us and help us to have the care for ourselves and others that reflects your glory. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the beauty of the earth, and for your eternal Word by which you called it all into being. Thank you also for Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, whose touch opens our blind eyes to the beauty that surrounds us, who makes us free to accept our natural and accidental limitations, and even to find meaning and hope in the midst of our sufferings. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:3-5

(1 John 1:5 – 2:11)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, illumine our minds by your Word and warm our hearts by your Spirit, so that in your light we may see light truly, and our lives may come to reflect more of the beauty, order, warmth and brightness of your glory. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, the light of your Word is an eternal flame that never goes out, and your glory is reflected in all that you have made. And yet we often walk in darkness because we have closed our mind's eye to your truth and to your presence and action all around us. Forgive our self-imposed blindness. And may our eyes be opened to the reflection of your brightness in your Word and your world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for surrounding us with the light and warmth of your Word and Spirit in the loving fellowship of your church. And thank you for the light and warmth that flood our minds and hearts whenever we share our gifts in the humble service and outreaching mission of your people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:6-10 [read to 13]

(2 Peter 3:1-18)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, open our eyes to the expanding knowledge of the universe that you would reveal to us through human observation of your great creation. Open our hearts also to the meaning and truth that you would reveal to us through your Word and your Spirit as we read and proclaim the message of Scripture. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O Lord, that we have not always been serious and careful about the difference between seeing things through the eyes of faith and seeing things through the gift of science. Forgive our laziness of thought and help us to render a good stewardship of both kinds of vision. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for revealing yourself to us in the words of Scripture as seen in the light of Christ and the Spirit, so that we have eyes of faith to see you at work in all the beauty and efficiency of creation, and in the history of salvation and in the happenings of our life and world today. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:20-25

(Romans 1:16-25)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, the creator and king of all nature, illumine our minds with your Word and Spirit. Give us faith to see through the beauty and ugliness of your fallen creation, the healing action of your forgiving presence. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, the beauty and majesty of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field are so awe inspiring that sometimes we tend worship the creature rather than the creator. Forgive our forgetfulness, O God. Keep us mindful that you are the source and that you are present and active in all that you have made. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God for the beauty of the earth, for all creatures great and small, for the familiar and the exotic animal life that have so wonderfully evolved under your guiding hand and your watchful eye. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:26-28, 2:18-24

(Colossians 1:15-20)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, send your Spirit among us. Help us to be shaped once again to the servant form of Jesus Christ, so that from now on our lives may reflect your image. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that reflecting your glory in the way we live our lives is not one of our big occupations. Forgive us, and help us to remember that we were created in your image and that our lives should be a reflection of your ways. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for entrusting the human race with the care and oversight of your great creation. And thank you for Jesus of Nazareth, the man who shows us how to live this life, and how to take care of your world, the man who shows us how to be a reflection of your likeness and of your glory. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 2:1-3

(Hebrews 4:1-16)

OPENING PRAYER

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength; by the power of your spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Noyes 1934, 1962, p. 36 from *The Book of Common Prayer*, adapted)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We plead guilty, O God, to the sin of restlessness, for our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. Forgive us for wandering in places where there is no rest, forgetting that you created us for yourself and that we can always find peace in your fellowship. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O Lord, for the joy and strength that we find in our daily walk and conversation with you through scripture and prayer, and for the peaceful rest that we find in the fellowship with you in our Christian family, the church. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 2:4-7

(1 Corinthians 15:35-50)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, our God, illumine our minds with your Word and Spirit. Help us to get a renewed sense of belonging to this earth from which you formed us with your hands. And may we also be restored to a sense of our completed dependence, from moment to moment, upon you who breathed into us the breath of life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that sometimes we lapse into self-centeredness, as if the world existed only for our benefit, or as if the universe revolved around our world. Forgive our blind and dumb arrogance, God, and help us to appreciate our home on this little planet. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS D(AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for creating us human beings out of the dust of the earth, and for breathing into our nostrils the breath of life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 1:29-31; 2:8-9, 15-17

(Romans 8:18-25)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, the creator and sustainer of all that is, and the Lord of history: melt our hearts with the fellowship of your Spirit and open our eyes with the light of your Word, so that we may recognize your providence in our life and world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we confess that we have overestimated our self-reliance and independence; and we have underestimated your care and direction in our lives. Forgive our arrogance, and open our eyes to the truth that you have seen and provided for our needs even before we felt them. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the beautiful garden of good things that is this world, which you have created to be our home. Thank you for providing everything that we need. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 2:10-14

(Revelation 22:1-5)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, we are gathered here as a spiritual family with you as our heavenly parent. Help us by the light of your Word and the power of your Spirit, to find our way back to the river of the water of life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

God our creator, we have been slow to embrace the story of Adam and Eve as the saga of our own experience. Forgive us and deliver us from the controversy between history and legend. Help us to identify with the story of rebellion that happened to the human race and continues to happen to each of us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that our story of human rebellion that did its worst in the crucifixion of Jesus has been overruled by your story of reconciliation and new life in his resurrection. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 2:18-24

(Ephesians 5:21-33)

OPENING PRAYER

We praise you, O God, for the gift of human companionship. Let your Spirit fall afresh upon us, so that we are set free once again to come out of ourselves and share ourselves more completely with the people you have given to be with us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, God, when we forget the fact that we have a part in the well-being of the people around us just as they have a part in our well-being. And keep us mindful of our incompleteness when we stand alone. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for beautiful men and strong women, and vice versa. And thank you for the blessing of ties that bind us together in the love of family and the love of Christian fellowship.

(We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 3:1-7

(Matthew 4:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get a renewed sense of our common lot with all human beings, descendants of Adam and Eve who are also subject to the temptation to be our own gods; yet sisters and brothers of Christ, who shows us how to resist that temptation and choose the way of subjection to your sole authority. We pray through Christ our leader. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we would much rather be in charge of what we believe about you, than to accept what you reveal about yourself. Forgive us and grant us the gift of humble subjection to you as Lord. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, that Jesus showed us the human possibility of resisting a steady stream of subtle temptations to self-importance and self-aggrandizement. And we thank you for his ultimate submission to your authority in his death on the cross, and his ultimate victory over the power of evil in his resurrection. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 3:8-13

(Romans 5:12-21)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you have created this world as a garden, and you have put us here to enjoy and take care of this beautiful habitat. Fill us anew with your Spirit, so that we may render a good stewardship of this trust. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, some of us come in confusion, some of us are just plain tired, and some of us come behind a false front, blaming others for our guilty thoughts and deeds. Fill us with the grace of your Spirit so that we may go forth with clear vision, set free by your forgiveness, and refreshed with new strength. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, Lord, that we no longer have to deny our guilt or hide from your face. You have released us from prison. Your grace enables us to admit our disobedience and receive forgiveness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 3:14-24

(Ephesians 2:1-22)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we acknowledge you as the creator of this beautiful world that you have called good. But we also notice that the beauty is spoiled by ugliness and the goodness is offset by evil and hurting. Help us by your Word and your Spirit to get a handle on this contradiction. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we have been so busy defending our compulsive actions and attitudes that we have been blind to our alienation from you, from others, and from our selves. Open our eyes and melt our hearts with your forgiveness, your love and your gift of reconciliation. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord! Thank you for the fellowship and peace that we have with you, with ourselves and with each other through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ, the light of our lives. Amen.

GENESIS 4:1-8

(1 John 3:11-18)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us through your Word and Spirit to have a new encounter with Jesus as the Christ who laid down his life for us. Bring us back to the point of being ready to lay down our own lives rather than to do harm to one of your children. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

It is hard to admit, O God, that sometimes a destructive rage lies just beneath the surface of our conscious emotions. But we know it is there. Help us to face it and receive your grace to manage it. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for your son, Jesus the Messiah, the prince of peace. He showed us the way of laying down one's life for the offending brother or sister rather than killing any human being. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 4:8-10

(Matthew 25:31-46)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you have given us responsibilities in our homes and communities and a mission of service and witness in our world. Help us to get a renewed sense of order, peace, and freedom in our lives because we do have mission responsibilities at home and in the world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God: in Jesus Christ you called us to be a servant people, but we do not do what you command. We are often silent when we should speak, and useless when we could be useful. We are lazy servants, timid and heartless, who turn neighbors away from your love. Have mercy on us, O God, and though we do not deserve your care, forgive us, and free us from sin. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (*The Worshipbook*, 1970, p. 26)

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O Lord, we celebrate every example of help, healing, and forgiveness among your children, the human family, our sisters and brothers in this world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 4:11-16

(1 John 4:13-21)

OPENING PRAYER

Hear, O Lord, when we cry aloud, be gracious to us and answer us! Our heart says for us to seek your face. We seek your face, Lord. Do not hide your face from us. Do not turn your servants away in anger, you who have been our help. Do not cast us off, do not forsake us, O God of our salvation! We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(from Psalm 27:7-9)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that sometimes we are possessed by unreasoning fear and apprehension. Help us to surrender everything once again into your care, to have trust instead of fear. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, that even our reasonable or guilty fears and anxieties may be overridden or neutralized by your mercy and forgiveness toward us. Like our brother, Cain, who murdered our other brother, Abel, we have been marked for eternity by the sign of your protection, the assurance of the due process of divine grace. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 4:17-22

(Romans 8:18-25)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, when we look at all the positive accomplishments of the human race, the beautiful works of creative genius and the useful works of industry and invention, we stand in awe of your own great work of creation that has made all of our human art and labor possible. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We often forget, O God, that you are the source of all human art and industry, and that our own accomplishments are gifts from you, extensions of your own works of creation and providence. Forgive our prideful conceits and help us to be better stewards of the powers your have given us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, for the joy of living and for the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. But, more especially, we thank you that these needs are provided through human industry and human resourcefulness. We rejoice in the development of human culture and civilization, which you have made possible and necessary. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 4:23-24

(Matthew 18:21-35)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you have turned your righteous anger and vengeance into infinite love and self-sacrificing forgiveness. Help us, through the cross and resurrection of Christ, to do the same with our own feelings of hostility and revenge. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave your life that we might receive pardon and peace. Now may we also exhibit the grace of surrender. Cleanse us of all our sins. Renew our hearts of love and give us the Holy Spirit, so that we may do your will with whole and thankful hearts. You, who have loved us so fully, show us how to love one another, and keep us close to you always. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, that Jesus Christ has set us free from the code of retribution, revenge and tit for tat. Now, in Christ, we are free and strong to show your love and forgiveness, toward people who have insulted, disrespected, or otherwise hurt us or our family and community. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 4:25 - 5:32

(Philippians 2:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you have chosen to work out the salvation of your people through many generations of the human family. Open our eyes by the truth of your Word and illumine our minds by the light of your Spirit, so that we may be restored to communion with you, our heavenly Father, we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that some of us have become too much absorbed in the study of our own family genealogies, while others of us have dismissed such knowledge as being completely irrelevant and useless. Forgive us at both extremes, and may we have the grace to recognize your saving work in the genealogy of the whole human family. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for revealing yourself in family stories throughout the history of the human race, most especially in the story of your family of faith, the spiritual descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and most completely among the adopted sisters and brothers of your only begotten son, Jesus the Messiah. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 6:1-8

(Romans 7:7-25)

OPENING PRAYER

O loving and gracious God, help us with the gift of your Spirit so that we may be restored to the embrace of your great love, which alone can overcome our coldness and make us feel the joy of being alive in a new way. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, Lord: we don't like to think of ourselves as habitual sinners. Far less do we like to think of sin as a trap from which we are helpless to free ourselves. Forgive us and set us free. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the love of Christ, which is stronger than the rebellion that hardens our hearts. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 6:9 – 8:22

[Suggest Genesis passage as 3 readings (6:9-22; 7:1-24; 8:1-22)

at different moments in the service, or 3 readings in

succession by 3 different readers.]

(1 Peter 3:12-22)

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, we praise you that in the time of Noah, you destroyed evil by the waters of the flood, giving righteousness a new beginning. Gracious God, remind us of the promises given in our baptism, and renew our trust in you. Make us strong to obey your will, and to serve you with joy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (adapted from *Book of Common Worship* 1993, p. 410; *Worshipbook* 1970, p. 47)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, God: we would rather not think of the tragedy and hurt in life as an expression of your judgment; we would rather not think of it as the work of an evil power; we would rather not think of it as an example of randomness in the universe; we would rather not think! Forgive us, God, and help us to face your reality. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for saving Noah's family through the flood; and for saving us through the water of baptism. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 8:20-22

[for a financial stewardship emphasis]

(Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:1-0; Mark 14:3-9)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to get past our modern sensitivities about primitive rites of animal sacrifice. May we be moved to sacrificial extravagance in demonstrating that we value your presence more highly than your material providence. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, sometimes we become so attached to the things you have given that we are not free to use them and give them. Forgive us, and help us learn how to burn some of our stuff, just so we can be free to use it and give it responsibly and thankfully. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the extravagant woman who poured precious ointment on your head; and for the grace you give us to blow off some of our precious money in celebration of your gift of life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 9:1-7

(Romans 13:1-7)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to feel your presence in our midst, and to have a due sense of all your mercies, including the gift of human government. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we know that even when we try to do our best we can think wrong, speak wrong, do wrong, be wrong; sometimes on purpose, sometimes by mistake, sometimes without noticing at all. But you notice. So we beg forgiveness and a chance to try again. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for your gift of human government, and most especially for the freedom and order that we have in this land. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 9:8-19

(Mark 10:17-22)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you have promised to never again destroy the human race with a great flood. Help us to get a due sense of our solidarity with all people, and may we learn how to treat all others as fellow passengers in the same ship. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, God: We often forget that your covenant of hope and promise signified in the rainbow is a covenant with your whole creation and not just with Bible believers like us, or even just with the whole human race. Forgive our forgetfulness and help us learn how to be more respectful of your whole creation, including, of course, all kinds of people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the great hope and promise of the human race and for all creation that is signified in the rainbow, the covenant given through Noah after the great flood. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 9:18-28

(Acts 21:37 – 22:16)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us by your Word and Spirit to see our own life stories in the light of your story of hurt and healing in Jesus. May we come to a better understanding of how things got to be the way they are, and how we can recognize and deal with what is. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, you are the creator and sustainer of all that is, and you are sovereign over all that happens. Sometimes we resort to strange stories and strained speculation to explain why you let certain things happen. Forgive us, we pray, and help us to accept your authority rather than trying to explain your exercise of it. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the word that traces all human nations back to your servant Noah, and thence to the first couple Adam and Eve. Thank you for your hand of healing that reaches out to all peoples in Jesus Christ. And thank you for giving your word that it is not your will for even one of your children be lost forever. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 10:1-32

(Acts 17:22-31)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us, by your Word and Spirit, to come to a full realization of what it means that all nations and races can be traced back to the trunk and root of one family tree, and that, therefore, all nations and races are still part of one big extended family, yours. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we devote a lot of time and thought to proclaiming and puzzling over your strange decree of a special destiny for your special people. But we often seem blind to the word that you are the source and governor of all the other peoples as well. Forgive us, God, and open our hearts and minds to our kinship with your larger family of nations. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the Hebrew Table of Nations, and for your self-revelation in Jesus the Christ, and for the evidence of modern anthropology, all of which affirm that all races and nations are part of your one family of humankind. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 11:1-9

(Acts 2:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us in these moments of praise and prayer and the hearing of your Word, to sort through our motives in the various doings and commitments of our lives; to know whether we are truly seeking your will to do it, or only following our own designs and desires. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, Lord: we are quicker to put our time and money into a building program or some new furnishings than we are to invest in spiritual witness or the serving of human needs. Forgive us and open our minds and hearts to your will and your ways. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, Lord, for human industry and human art, and for grace to use these gifts in your service. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 12:1-9

(Matthew 10:1-23)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, help us to let go and detach ourselves from the security of familiar places and accustomed faces. Make us ready to venture into those places and relationships to which you are calling us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we are ever cautious when it comes to the risk and persistence needed for the mission of your church. Forgive our timidity and weakness. Give us the daring of pioneers and the strength of builders. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for calling us, your church, into a life of adventure and outreaching mission and witness. Thank you for the examples of trust and obedience that we have in Abraham and in the 12 apostles. And thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who makes us free and strong to answer your call with trust and obedience. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 13:1-18

(Matthew 20:20-28)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, renew in us today the grace that we need to be large in spirit toward other people, to be truly generous in our relationships with family and friends, able to defer to the desires and interests of others – even when we feel that we have a much better idea and insight into the general good. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O loving and gracious God, we like to think of ourselves as being big enough people to defer to the wishes and needs of others. And so we are when it comes to the small stuff or where our emotional investment is low. But the fact is, we find it hard to do in specific cases where the stakes are high and we have strongly felt preferences. Forgive us, and enlarge our hearts by your grace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for this good land; for food, shelter, and clothing; and for the generous and forgiving presence of the Christ-like spirit in the midst of the various peoples that make up this one people under God. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 14:1-24

(Hebrews 7:1-28)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, give us a vision of hope. Restore to us the gift of faith in the human potential for goodness and peace. We need to believe once again that by the miracle of your grace it is possible for the people of this world to live together in mutual respect. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, you who have made of one all the peoples that dwell on the face of the earth, we admit that sometimes we feel no sense of communion with some of the people in your world. Forgive us and help us to embrace our community with all the peoples of the earth, including those from whom we are separated by differences of faith and culture. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God for the sharing of bread and wine, a universal sign of your vision of peace and unity among previously warring tribes and nations. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 15:1-6

(Romans 4:1-8, 16-25)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, to find once again a real sense of contentment, trust and expectancy in life. Give us the faith to believe in your faithfulness and power, trusting that you can and will do as you have promised, even though it may seem to be impossible at this late date. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we admit to a recurring discontent in our lives. We have trouble accepting our limitations, failures, and disappointments. We have trouble accepting the world as it is. We have trouble learning to live by your promises. Forgive our lapses into despair and help us to believe in you, and so to accept ourselves and our world as your works in progress. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for your promises and your power to fulfill them. Thank you for the gift of believing you and for graciously reckoning this gift to us as a right relationship with you. Thank you for the joy of living in your covenant of grace. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 16:1-16

(2 Peter 3:1-18)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, we have come together here today as people who have been waiting for your appearing and seeking your presence. Come to us and do not tarry in your coming. Show us your presence in our midst at this time, so that we may rejoice and be glad in the love of your salvation, and go out proclaiming your greatness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we truly believe in you and your promises, but we must admit to becoming impatient with the pace of your fulfillments. We take matters into our own hands on a daily basis, and oh, how often we do botch the job. Forgive our impertinence, Oh God, and help us by your Spirit to wait for you with the same patience that you wait for us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the sheer honesty of the biblical saga of salvation. Here we find hope and assurance of your power and will to get us back on track after our impetuous, ill-conceived, and disastrous detours in life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 17:10-27

(Colossians 2:8-15)

OPENING PRAYER

O loving and gracious God, you have given us ritual signs of your action for our salvation. And so we have been baptized with water. Open our hearts again with a fresh inflow of your Holy Spirit, so that the ritual sign may point to something that is alive and at work within us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, we humbly confess that our promise to be your disciples, to study your Word, and to teach your children has sometimes been taken lightly, and sometimes outright broken. Forgive our negligence, O God, and help us to make a new beginning with regular study and teaching of your way. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, holy God, for the sign and seal of your grace in the baptism of each of us. Make us strong to obey your will, and to serve you with joy. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 18:1-16

(Matthew 25:31-46)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to recover the image of your presence in the life of Jesus, so that our eyes may be opened in a new way to your presence in our own friends, family members, and others who are weak or hurting and who need our kindness and patient acceptance. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit it, Lord: we failed to recognize you when you came to us yesterday in the form of a family member who needed understanding and acceptance instead of explanations and problem solving. Forgive us, and open our eyes to your presence in the needy people that we encounter every day. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for making yourself known to us in some of the strangest places, and in the most surprising people. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 18:17-33

(1 Peter 2:21-25)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get a new sense of your coming to us and suffering with us in Jesus Christ so that we might be renewed and strengthened by the sense of our participation in his death and resurrection. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that some of our prayers are just too polite and sophisticated. We seem to feel that pleading and begging and bargaining with you are beneath our dignity. Forgive our proud airs, O God. Open our eyes, minds, and hearts once again to the personal peace that can only be had when we plead urgently, work vigorously, and bargain shamelessly with you for the healing and restoration of this sick and broken world. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for this fellowship in which we may bear one another's burdens, rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 19:1-29

(Isaiah 52:7-9, 53:1-3)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, open our minds to the content of your Word by the light of your Spirit. Give us the freedom and will to move forward toward your vision for us, and not be blocked or paralyzed by the backward look at things we must let go and leave behind. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

You know, O Lord, that we are sometimes paralyzed with fear and doubt and compulsive attachments, even when the way of courage, truth, and freedom is clear before us. Forgive us, O God, and make us free and strong to risk, and sacrifice, and let go, in obedience to you and to the best that is within us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for this time of worship and fellowship, when we pause to get back in touch with your liberating Word and your Spirit of light and strength. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 21:1-21

(Galatians 4:21 – 5:1)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to receive the good news of freedom in your grace anew today. Only then can we walk free of our self-imposed requirements, the compulsive legalisms that enslave us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we keep on retreating from the life of freedom that you have given us in the gospel. The way of the law has a certain attraction for us, because we get to judge others and even condemn ourselves. Our old slavery fits comfortably like a well-worn shoe. Forgive our lapses, O God of mercy, and help us to reclaim our freedom. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for reminding us in the birth of Isaac, that the gifts of wholeness and freedom in our lives come by your initiative and according to your plans and your timing, and not according to our human devices and strivings. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 22:1-19

(Hebrews 11:17-22)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us in our prayers and affirmations, and through the hearing of your Word, and by the inward help of your Spirit, to peel back some of the encrusted layers of our lives and return to you, our creator. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Loving and all gracious God, your requirement for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son that you gave to him and Sarah, is beyond our comprehension and explanation. We would rather avoid this text. We also like to avoid getting in touch with the deepest hurts and sacrifices in our own lives and in the life of the world around us. Forgive our resistance, O God, and help us to peel back the layers of our own experience and find a deeper healing in the sacrifice of your own son. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O Lord, we are so thankful for the great stories about the experience of our early mothers and fathers in the Old Testament. They help us to get in touch with the layers of faith experience in our own life stories. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the saving sacrifice. Amen.

GENESIS 23:1-20

(Hebrews 11:8-16)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to be in touch with your promises to us, so that we may live our lives in the attitude of hope, joy, expectancy, thankfulness, and faith. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that we have not learned from Abraham's example, and have neglected to master the oriental rituals and courtesies of gracious indirection and wide-awake bargaining in our everyday transactions. Forgive our laziness and naivety, and grant us the sensitivity to appreciate and benefit from the best of those graces. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, that whether or not we own a cemetery plot or a niche in a mausoleum or columbarium, our final resting place in you has been bought and paid for by your Son, Jesus Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 24:1-67

(Suggest Three Readers: Verses 1-27, 28-49, 50-67)

(Ephesians 5:21-33)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, you have not forsaken your steadfast love and your faithfulness, but you remain present in your world and with your people. Open us up to your Word by your Spirit, and to your Spirit by your Word, so that we may be aware of your presence and your guiding hand in our lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have offended you, O God, in our failure to admit our shortcomings and offenses toward our loved ones. Forgive us, and help us in our dearest relationships to confess our offenses and to forgive each other every day from the bottom of our hearts. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O holy Father, you are the creator of all things, and the source of every blessing. We thank you for creating male and female human beings, and for giving them freedom to be joined as husband and wife, united in body and heart. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Cf. *Book of Common Worship* 1993, p. 869)

GENESIS 25:19-34

(Romans 9:6-13)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to get the drift of your process of salvation in human history, a process that is much bigger than the success or failure of our church or our own personal witness. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, it is hard for us to get our minds wrapped around the word that we are all predestined for destruction because we are part of a sinful and fallen people. Harder still for us to accept your grace and forgiveness that reverses our polarity and predestines us for wholeness and heaven. Forgive our dullness, O God, and open our hearts to the joy and majesty of your double predestination. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, we thank you that your unswerving purpose is for the rescue and healing of all people. Thank you for the promise that your purpose will be fulfilled through your selective process, selecting certain persons and nations as the peculiar instruments of your salvation, and selecting all people and your whole creation as the objects of your salvation. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 26:1-33

(Ephesians 2:11-22)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us again, O God, to get a due sense of all your mercies toward us. Fill our lives with your generous and loving Spirit, so that we may in turn be a blessing to the lives of those we meet. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Sometimes, Lord, we overlook your blessings of peace and forgiveness that we enjoy every day. We forget to show our thankfulness by being a blessing to others. At other times we simply despair at the persistence of conflict and violence in the world, and lose sight of the greater power of reconciliation and peacemaking. Forgive our blindness and forgetfulness; restore our hope; and help us to be thankful ambassadors of reconciliation, instruments of your peace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, Lord, for the blessings of land and water, and for people who know how to develop and share these resources. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 27:1 - 40 or 45

(Romans 11:13-36)

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes, O God, to the majesty and wonder of your selective workings among particular people for the healing of the nations and the salvation of all people and your whole creation. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

It is hard for us, O God, to give up our preoccupation with human motivations and human meanings so that we can look for your purpose and your healing presence in the things that are happening. Forgive us and help us to refocus our attention so that we can receive the revelation of what it is that you are doing in our life and in our world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, God, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, and the part that each one played in the drama that you wrought for our healing and salvation. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 27:41 or 46 – 28:9

(1 Corinthians 7:12-16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

OPENING PRAYER

Open our minds, O God, to learn the positive values of other religions and to consider how you might intend to use them in our lives and in the healing of the nations.. Send your Holy Spirit among us so that our hearts might be warmed by your love for all people and we might be more welcoming toward people of other faiths. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we have sometimes been too fearful and suspicious of the religion and customs of other peoples. Forgive us, Lord, and help us learn to receive as well as give. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O lord, for the rich faith and culture of the Christian people, and for our long tradition of friendship and cooperation with people of other faiths. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 28:10-22

(John 1:43-51)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we pray that by your Word and your Spirit we may receive such a revelation in the life of your Son Jesus Christ that our eyes may be opened once again from spiritual blindness, that we may see your presence and your activity in our life and world, and that our confusion in life may be replaced with a sense of meaning and purpose. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We have gone along our own way, O Lord, seldom noticing that you are leading us and providing a way for us. Forgive our spiritual blindness. Show yourself to us. Speak to us. And wake us up to your presence and action in our life and world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for Jesus Christ, the “Jacob’s Ladder” of our communication with you, our maker. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 29:1-14

(Luke 15:1-32 or 1-3, 11-32)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, open our eyes and our hearts to the blessings of family and friendship that we may sometimes fail to notice just because they are constant gifts from you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, we fail to fully notice and appreciate the network of family and friends that supports us from day to day, until extended absence followed by reunion wakes up our awareness and feelings. Forgive our oblivion and bring us out of our stupor. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for family and friends, near and far, and for the supporting network of this congregation, our spiritual family. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 29:15-30

(1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5, Philippians 2:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, open our eyes and warm our hearts as we meditate on your Word and pray to receive the light of your Spirit. Help us to see and feel that you are present and active in the life of the world today, not only in the goodness and beauty of it, but also in the hurt and brokenness of it. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we are still prone to see you exclusively in the work of the Church or in the printed page of your Word, while refusing to see you in the events and conditions of our daily lives. Forgive our religiosity and our false piety, O God. Open our eyes and our hearts to your presence and action in the world today. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, O God, for every sign of your presence and activity in our life and world, for things of beauty and acts of love and healing, all in the midst of a world of hurting, evil, and decay. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 29:31 – 30:24

(1 Peter 2:9-10)

OPENING PRAYER

Living God, let your Holy Spirit move among us and within our hearts today. And may your Word and your Spirit light up our minds and warm up our hearts with a new sense that we are truly your people, a world-wide community that is set apart to pray for and minister to and be a light for all the peoples of the world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that our sense of destiny as your people can sometimes lead us into acts of arrogance with respect to other peoples. Forgive our self-pride and show us how to be your true light to the nations. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for calling us out of darkness into the light of your love, and for making us a special people, to proclaim your deeds in all that we say and do. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 30:25-43

(Luke 12:13-21)

OPENING PRAYER

God, help us during this hour to get detached from our everyday worries over making ends meet, or maintaining and increasing our financial estate, as the case may be. Restore to us a true perspective on the economic blessings and problems in our life, so that we might again put our trust in you and freely render a good stewardship of all that you have given us. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we confess that there have been times when we were not as open and straightforward in our economic dealings as we should have been. Give us the combined graces of humility and self-esteem that will enable us to keep a proper balance between our legitimate self interest and a responsible Christian compassion and respect for the people with whom we do business. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the freedom and responsibility that you have given us in the management of resources and the acquiring of wealth. Help us to keep that freedom and responsibility in balance. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 31:1-55

[Give an introductory brief of vv. 1-42 and read vv. 43-55]

(Romans 5:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and gracious God, you came to earth and caught up with us in your Son, Jesus Christ; and you have reconciled all people to yourself through him. Give us the strength that we need to catch up with any persons who may have hurt us, and whom we may have hurt with our refusal to forgive; and, in so far as it depends on us, give us the grace to find reconciliation with them. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Sometimes we have refused to talk with each other when we should have, knowing that we could not easily agree. Sometimes we have held out for high principles when we should have settled for practical realities, and sometimes the other way around. Forgive our hard heartedness and help us to forgive that of others. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the new covenant in Christ that is based on your gift of forgiveness and reconciliation, and that calls us to forgive and be reconciled with each other. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 32:1-21

(Isaiah 50:4-6)

OPENING PRAYER

God of peace and God of power, help us learn how to navigate troubled waters in this world of conflict and misunderstandings. Give us grace and courage to trust and take risks, plus wisdom and caution to verify and to be prepared for both good and evil. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we are often afraid to reach out for reconciliation with those whom we love but have hurt and by whom we have been hurt. Forgive our cowardice and obstinacy. Give us courage and humility to forgive and be forgiven. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the gift of shalom which means peace and well being. And thank you for the wonderful blessing and thrill of being reunited with friends and family after long times of separation. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 32:22-32

(Acts 9:1-9)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you have called us to see your face. And so, in the midst of all of our rebellion, resistance, and inward struggle, we are hoping to find you or that you will find us. Show yourself to us, in spite of everything we do to hide from you and to resist your will. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we admit that we have been preoccupied in a striving with other people, forgetting our true destiny, which is to strive with you our God. Forgive us and come to meet us for that long delayed wrestling match. Surely you will let us win and gain your blessing. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for our Christian names, our given names, signifying that our lives not only spring from your great creation, but are also drawn toward your gracious redemption. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 33:1-20

(Mark 15:1-15)

OPENING PRAYER

Open our eyes and our hearts, O God, so that we might be moved by the generosity of Esau and the humility of Jacob to commit ourselves once again to imitating the surrender your Son, Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, you are full of grace and goodness and have never done the slightest evil, yet in Jesus Christ you humbled yourself and showed us the way of sacrifice and surrender. Help us who always fall short of your glory to follow his example of denial, and so be filled with the grace of subjection to your will and to the needs of other people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for the gift of self-surrender in the cross of Christ, which delivers us from the self-tyranny of always demanding our own way, and which reminds us to be honest about our self-centeredness. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 33:18 – 34:31

(Ephesians 2:10-22)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, as individuals, as a church, and as a nation, to be renewed in the courage and commitment of facing up to the frequently unpleasant facts about ourselves and about our neighbors. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We as a people have contributed to the rape of the land and the massacre of its people, both here and abroad, in the distant past and more recently. We have been mute about the neglect and abuse of children in our own neighborhoods and schools, and about the massacre of civilians in distant lands. Forgive our cowardly quietism. Give us grace to forgive past evils and courage to stand for the right, now and always. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Father God, for Mother Earth and her people. May our vision of the unity of all people in Jesus Christ be at least as generous as the earth people's vision of the unity of all that exists under the great sky. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 35:1-15

(Romans 12:1-21)

OPENING PRAYER

O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, help us to experience a true renewal and cleansing of our hearts, a changing of the spiritual garments so that we may be free and strong to fulfill our vows of discipleship by giving of ourselves in every way to serve and support your church. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that we have again allowed false gods to accumulate on the altars of our hearts. Forgive us for worshiping our own life style and our hard earned comforts. Give us courage and strength to put away our foreign gods, as we continue to worship you in this “Bethel” – house of God. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for your patience, forgiving our negligence of you and our casual attachment to other gods. Thank you for continually inviting us back into your house to fulfill our vows of worship and praise, and for sending us out once again to fulfill our vows of humble service in daily living. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 35:16-29

(Acts 7:2-16)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, send your Holy Spirit among us to open our minds and hearts to your word of Scripture. May we get a clear sense of the majesty of your selective yet inclusive process for the salvation of the whole world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we mark with appropriate rituals the major milestones in our lives and those of our loved ones, such as birth, baptism, graduation, wedding, and death. But we often fail to reflect on these milestones as signposts that point to how we should live differently in your future. Forgive us for moving on without taking thought for how you would have us make changes in our lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for giving your own son for the redemption of all people. And thank you for choosing each of us individually to be messengers of that good news. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 36:1-14, 40 – 37:2

(John 10:16)

OPENING PRAYER

O loving and gracious God, we gather around your family table to share in communion with you and to receive the proclamation of your word of truth. Send your Holy Spirit among us so that we might be one with our sisters and brothers in faith in all the world, and one with you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O god, that we have sometimes acted as if you were only calling people like us, rather than calling all people, some of them through us. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us your peace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Creator God, we affirm that everything surrounding us is the result of your handiwork. We marvel at the earth's splendor. The wonders of weather and the changing seasons fill us with awe. We find symbols of hope for humankind in the regenerative power of nature. Like the psalmist of old, we give you great praise and thanks for the many miracles that enfold us. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 37:2-36

(Mark 15:21-32)

OPENING PRAYER

Our God and God of our ancestors, may we receive grace through your Word and Spirit to find redemption and healing in the midst of our sufferings, and thus to perceive the figure of the Christ in our own life stories. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, we confess that we have been blind to the presence of Christ in the rock that gives water in the wilderness, in various Old Testament personalities, in Jesus of Nazareth, and in the Christ figures of our world and culture today. Forgive us and open our eyes to your suffering presence in the world and in our lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O Christ, for being present at creation and present on the cross, so that we may find you in the beauties of nature, and in the redemptive power of any suffering that is accepted and endured with courage and obedience. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 38:1-30

(John 4:1-30)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, strengthen us by your Word with a renewed respect for truthfulness in all things. Help us by your Spirit to have a sense of when to keep silence and how much information to announce in every situation of our lives. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that we are afraid to confront the rage that burns within when we are slighted or cheated out of the goods and opportunities of life, or when we are misunderstood or misrepresented. And we do have tendency to avoid any mention or even to deny the facts of our most serious mistakes and failures. Forgive us, God. Help us to face and resolve our resentments constructively. And give us courage to acknowledge our mistakes and failures rather than cover up or deny them. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for people of courage and conviction, people who act out their righteous indignation in ways that convict and encourage indifferent communities. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 39:1-23

(Hebrews 12:1-4)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, by the power and inspiration of your Word and Spirit, to have the strength of character to resist temptation and to serve you with integrity and obedience, and with honor and respect for you and for all people. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O Lord, our God, we sometimes go into panic and despair because we are severely tested by evil forces, forgetting that you are always present to help us through every trial that we may encounter. Forgive our little faith, and preserve us through the trials and temptations of this present time. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for the many examples of strong character and moral discipline among the young people of our times. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 40:1-23

(Acts 16:6-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, open our hearts and minds to the truth of your Word, so that we may know what you were saying to the people of old, and be guided by your Holy Spirit to understand what you are saying to us right now in the present situations of our everyday life. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we admit that forgetfulness of your blessings in the past and your promises for the future has dampened our response of praise, obedience, service, and giving. Forgive us, God. Help us to be more mindful, more thankful, more obedient, more helpful, and more giving. We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for giving us a mission in life through Jesus Christ, and for being with us in the Holy Spirit to give strength and guidance for our tasks. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 41:1-57

(Romans 8:28-39)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, bring to life in us the sense of a gracious presence and power in the world, of a providence that never sleeps, of a love that never fails, and so unite us with yourself in our hopes and thoughts that using all our strength to do those things which please you we may live in your favor and in that light which ever broadens to the perfect day. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Noyes 1934, 1962, pp. 43-44 adapted)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We affirm in our hearts, O God, that you are working out your purposes in the things that happen, even when terrible events hide their meaning from our minds. But sometimes our thoughts rebel, and we long to know by sight rather than by faith. O lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, grant us your peace. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

We thank you, Lord, for new blessings that make us forget old hardships and losses. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 42:1-38

(Romans 6:1-11)

OPENING PRAYER

Help us, O God, to regain a sense of your love, your power, and your justice at work in the things that are and the things that happen in our lives and in your world. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, when it comes to the confrontation and crisis encounters of our everyday lives, we so often lack the presence of mind to use our best wisdom to say and do that which would best express your love, your power, and your justice. Forgive us for failing to wait for the guidance of your Word and your Spirit. Help us learn to wait upon you, O God. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for wise and generous Joseph, in whom the figure of the Christ is seen long before the time of Jesus. And thank you for our own baptism, our spiritual death and resurrection in Christ, so that in our new lives of surrender and lowly service, the figure of the Christ can be seen in us long after the time of Jesus. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 43:1-34

(1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5, 13:12)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, send us help from above, and show us your heavenly light. Keep us from the folly of thinking that we know you fully, and from the sorrow of imagining that you are too great to be known at all. May our thoughts of you be just and true, and our feelings toward you full of reverence and love. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Noyes 1934 and 1962, from *A Book of Offices and Prayers*, adapted here)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We admit, O God, that instead of simply accepting the beautiful gift of life and enjoying it, we are always trying to explain and reorganize it. Forgive this folly of wanting to know everything, and help us to be more appreciative of the wonder and mystery of life as it is. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, Lord, for heroes of the faith, who have suffered persecution and been deprived of the goodness of life, yet have believed in your perfect goodness and love. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 44:1-34

(Matthew 25:31-46)

OPENING PRAYER

God, open our eyes by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit among us. May we see the figure of the Christ in your noble servant Joseph. And may we find in the Christ figure a window into our own souls, and a renewed sense of our calling and destiny to be your faithful servants, after the image of Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We confess, O God, that sometimes it is easy for us to pronounce judgment on others when they have failed or wronged us. And sometimes we are all too ready to play the victim when we have failed or met resistance. But we are not so quick to take the role of servant when we have opportunity to help someone in need. Forgive us, God. Restore us once again to the image of Jesus. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the servant image of Jesus Christ our Lord, and for his call to each of us to serve him by serving each other, and by allowing our neighbor to be our servant too. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 45:1-28

(Ephesians 2:1-22)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to recognize your power to bring new life out of our worst fortunes, redemption through our worst mistakes, and reconciliation across our deepest chasms. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

How easily we despair, O God, and forget about your power to bring good out of evil. Forgive us and help us to recognize your good purposes being fulfilled through the times of hardship and hurt. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, O God, for your chosen servants and stewards, people who can help us to see the mystery of your love, revealed in our own life stories. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 46:1-7, 28-34

(Matthew 26:36-39 or John 4:16-28)

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord our God, let these walls, these windows, these pews, this pulpit, this table, and this font speak to us today of your presence with us here on past occasions. As we remember times past and people long gone, may we feel your presence with us here now through the truth of your Word and the presence of your Spirit. We pray through Christ our leader. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We feel trapped and afraid, O God, when forced by circumstance to make fateful decisions about our future, especially if we are required to move from the old and familiar to the new and strange. But we forget that you are present in every place and circumstance and we are free to go in your love and without fear. Forgive us, take away our fear, and restore our trust in you. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you God for the familiar places in our lives that mean so much to us. And thank you for always being with us in the Spirit as we move from place to place. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 47:1-27

(2 Corinthians 4:26 – 5:10; Philippians 4:10-13)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, help us to be refreshed in a true awareness of our dependence upon you and our dependence on other people as we make our journey in this life where we are temporary residents. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

We keep forgetting, O God, that we are strangers and sojourners in this world and that our real citizenship is in the commonwealth of heaven. Forgive us, God. Help us to remember and to embrace our spiritual citizenship. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for coming here in Jesus of Nazareth to hike and camp with us in this passing world. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 47:27 – 48:22

(1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, illumine our minds with the wisdom that you have given in your Word of scripture and that has been handed down to us through human tradition. And open our hearts to the strangeness of your ways among us by the power of your Spirit. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we have searched high and low for reasonable explanations of who you are and why you do as you do, explanations that you don't choose to give. And we have been blind to your personal data that you have revealed so clearly in your son Jesus of Nazareth. Give us the grace that we need to accept your way without explanations. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the human traditions that tell us how the people of Israel and the people of the Church remember your dealings with them in history. And thank you, more especially, for your dealings with us right now, by your presence in Word and Spirit. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 49:1-28

(Luke 22:14-30)

OPENING PRAYER

O God, open our ears by the power of your Spirit. May we hear some good word from you about our future as your children. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

O God, we have dared to question your providing when we see the persistence of want in the world. But the cycle of abundance and poverty should make us aware of the resources of love and community by which we can help each other to survive. Forgive our attitude of futility and give us a heart of hope to do what we can with what we have where we are. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the final Testament of our father Jacob announcing the destiny of his 12 sons, fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel, and for your new will and Testament given through your only begotten Son Jesus to the 12 apostles, the commandment that we love one another, no more and no less. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ the Lord. Amen.

GENESIS 49:28 –50:14

(John 11:17-38)

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, we bless you for the great company of all those who have kept the faith, finished their race, and who now rest from their labor. Help us to believe where we have not seen, trusting you to lead us through our years. Bring us at last with all your saints into the joy of your home. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Book of Common Worship*, 1993, p. 916, adapted)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Forgive us, Lord, that puritan strain in us which denies your presence in human art, handiwork, sentiment, and ritual. Forgive us also that pious strain which has to cover your simple presence with too much of everything. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

O God, before whom generations rise and pass away, we thank you for your servant Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel. But most of all we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ who by dying has destroyed the power of death, and by rising from the grave has opened the way of eternal life. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Book of Common Worship*, 1993, p. 921, adapted)

GENESIS 50:15-26

(1 John 4:13-21)

OPENING PRAYER

Our God and God of our fathers, grant that our worship this Lord's Day may be acceptable to you. Sanctify us through your Spirit, and may we share in the blessings of your Word. Teach us to be satisfied with the gifts of your goodness and gratefully to rejoice in all your mercies. Purify our hearts that we may serve you in truth. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Union Prayer Book*, p. 58, adapted)

CONFESSION OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

Almighty God, sometimes we forget that we are sinners, unworthy servants, always in need of your grace and mercy in each moment of our lives. At other times we forget that we are forgiven and redeemed, free to live in the joy of your grace and mercy. Give us your Spirit anew in this and every time of confusion, to keep us aware of both our guilt and your grace, our sickness and your healing, our sin and your salvation. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKS (AND DEDICATION)

Thank you, God, for the mystery of your good plans which turn evil into good. (We thankfully dedicate ourselves to your service in all that we are and all that we do, and these gifts to the ministries of your church.) We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PART III

THE PSALMS

CHAPTER VI

Texts for Singing and Praying as the Body of Christ

[¶1] *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, 78, follows the *Lectionary for Mass* in providing a Psalm for each Sunday or other feast, selected as a sung liturgical response to the reading of the first lesson, that is, the reading from the Old Testament. Liturgical scholars sometimes refer to the Psalm at that point in the worship service as the gradual Psalm or simply the gradual, so called because it is chanted or led by a priest or song leader from the steps (*gradus*) leading to the pulpit in historic worship dating from the earliest Christian churches, according to Shepherd 1976a, 36-37, 44, 83, who affirms the idea that the gradual psalms are a corporate utterance and not additional lessons. Horace T. Allen, in *Reformed Liturgy and Music*, Spring 1992, 84-85, lists seven principles that governed the Psalter selections in *The Revised Common Lectionary*. The Psalm selections in *The Revised Common Lectionary* include all or portions of 105 of the 150 canonical psalms plus ten scriptural canticles, as stated on Page 78. N. T. Wright 2006, 151-152, discusses the importance of reading, saying, singing, chanting, whispering, and learning by heart the psalms for the health and vitality of Christian faith in life and worship. Deiss 1992, 35, stresses the place and function of the canonical psalms in the Christian faith, and therefore in worship, by reference to the words of the risen Christ in Luke 24:44 “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, *and the psalms* must be fulfilled” (emphasis added). Jungman 1959, 167 and 282, discusses the practice of singing a psalm responsorially following each reading of scripture in the worship of the early church and the use of *all* the psalms each week in the readings for the hours

(daily office) from the 6th century forward. Shepherd 1976a, 16, notes that didactic psalms “are related to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and probably were not intended for liturgical use.” He also observes, 35, that the church’s divergence from the practices of ancient synagogue and Temple in how the psalms are used in public worship and in personal devotions stems, in part at least, from the prophetic interpretation of psalms in the New Testament. Old 1998b, 326-327, gives an example from Jerome (ca. 347-419) indicating that a preacher might occasionally have given some interpretation of the sung Psalm. He also notes, 358, that Augustine (354-430 C.E.) preached or wrote commentaries on all 150 psalms over a period of about 26 years (392-418 C.E.), and most often preached on the psalm that had been sung in the liturgy. Bonhoeffer 1954, 44-50, reflecting his own Word-of-God biblical theology perspective and his own spiritual piety, a kind of German Christ-mysticism, the same sort of born-again piety that Borg 2001, 234, assigns to the Apostle Paul, “a Jewish Christ-Mystic,” and possibly a sophisticated first cousin of the familiar “Jesus piety” of the German middle classes, affirms that the book of Psalms is both the Word of God and the prayer book of Christ’s church. Thus, the psalms can be both preached in corporate worship and sung and prayed corporately, and can serve as a school of prayer, teaching us what to pray and how to pray. And we must never forget that the same spiritual rock who provided Corrie ten Boom a spiritual hiding place through the humiliations and horrors of the Nazi rampages had also gone to the scaffold in Jesus and had come back to shield his little sister Corrie and to hold his little brother Dietrich’s hand on the way to his own scaffold. Bonhoeffer states that the secret of the Psalter is that the One who is praying in the psalms is none other than the man Jesus Christ, so that it is only as the body of Christ praying together that we can pray the whole Psalter, including those psalms in which we, the body of Christ, pray as the one who protests his innocence, imprecates his enemies, and

claims to have experienced infinite depths of suffering, not that the empirical church can make such claims, but only “the essential church” (Bonhoeffer’s *The Communion of Saints*, 1963) praying as the body of Christ. Shepherd 1976a, 87-89, discusses a variety of approaches and resources for the use of the Psalms in worship, as does Old 1995, 55-75. Some of the resources available for the singing of the psalms are listed in *The Psalter: Psalms and Canticles for Singing* 1993, 21. There is also a listing of resources for the Psalm settings in Bower 1996, xv. There are musical settings for almost every Sunday Psalm of *The Revised Common Lectionary* in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, 2013.

[¶2] Some users of *The Open Bible Lectionary* might wish to use *The Revised Common Lectionary* as a resource for selecting a psalm for each Sunday. This can easily be done by reference to Index II beginning on Page 112 of *The Revised Common Lectionary* to find out when the Old Testament reading of *The Open Bible Lectionary* is used in *The Revised Common Lectionary* and then checking in the lectionary table itself to see which psalm or canticle has been appointed for use with that Old Testament reading. In cases where *The Open Bible Lectionary* uses an Old Testament reference not found in *The Revised Common Lectionary* one might check for a similar reference in the Old Testament that *is* used in *The Revised Common Lectionary*. Otherwise, the musician or other worship planner might reflect on the Old Testament reading and make her own selection of an appropriate psalm response. This approach has the advantage of being conveniently supported by the various denominational and ecumenical Psalter resources. Another resource for selecting psalms according to liturgical seasons, feasts, and special occasions is Shepherd 1976b, *A Liturgical Psalter for the Christian Year*, especially page 105. On the other hand, some users of other lectionaries may wish to use some of the psalm-based liturgical texts presented here in correspondence with their Psalm of the

day.

[¶3] Another approach to the use of the Psalms in worship is to sing right through the book of Psalms from 1 to 150 in course (*recitatio continua de scriptura*) as has been done historically in some monastic communities and other religious orders and in some pre-Reformation church liturgies, and in some Reformation (Protestant) communions. I have briefly modeled this approach in Book I, Chapter V under the heading “The Final Four.” There, I provide liturgical accompaniments in presenting manuscripts of my last four sermons to illustrate four main approaches to the structuring of sermons. The liturgical accompaniments include a Psalm of the day using Psalms 1 – 4 in order and providing liturgical texts for Call to Worship, Call to Confession, Words of Grace and Healing, and Call for Offerings based on sentences and paraphrases from the Psalm of the Day and taken from my catalogue of liturgical prompts based on each Psalm, Psalm portion, or combination of Psalms using each and all of the 150 Psalms, which catalogue follows here. There, in Book I, Chapter V, I indicate that the Psalm of the Day should be voiced by the whole assembly immediately following the Call to Worship, preferably sung responsorially with the help of a choral music leader, or sung as a hymn if there is such a setting in the church’s hymnal, or sung in some other type of musical setting, or read responsively with a leader taking the odd numbered verses and the congregation taking the even-numbered verses using the uniform Bibles provided in the pews or using printed handouts. Shepherd 1976a, 27, 35, points out that reciting all of the psalms in canonical continuity and using psalms between all of the other readings in worship are practices that were not intended or done in Temple and synagogue and represent a kind of “Christologizing” of the Psalter, based in part on the prophetic interpretation of the Psalter in the New Testament. I indicated above that Bonhoeffer 1954, 44-50, “Christologizes” the psalms on the basis of a kind of Word-of-God

Christ Mysticism rather than simply on the basis of prophecy. He suggests that when the psalmist protests his innocence before God it is a clue that the one praying in the psalms is Christ himself, praying vicariously for his Church, and that, therefore, it is appropriate that the church, as the body of Christ, should pray from Jesus' prayer book, the psalms, in corporate worship until the end of time. Shepherd 1976a, 56-60, discusses the systematic recitation of "The Psalms in Monastic and Collegial Communities," in particular the Benedictine Rule in which all 150 Psalms were sung each week and the Roman Rule ordered by the emperor Charlemagne. Shepherd 1976a, 53-73, also reviews the larger background, history, and later development of the Daily Offices, including the personal devotion breviaries, with especial attention to the coverage and distribution of the Psalms (also cited in n. 8). The approach of singing through the psalms in canonical continuity clearly avoids any overdoing of arranging a thematic unity among the elements of the Lord's Day service, against which Skudlarek 1981, 102, has cautioned as a possible abuse of the nature of the service as an encounter with a person and an event rather than a "head trip" around a theme. Jungman 1959, 286-287, discusses the arrangement of the psalms in the daily office of the hours in the Roman liturgy before Gregory the Great as taking the psalms "simply in the order in which they stand in the Bible" except on great feasts. Grisbrooke 1978, 360, discusses regarding the monastic offices during the formative period of the divine office "the invention of *recitatio continua*, the practice of reciting the whole Psalter, in its biblical order, over a given period of time and number of offices, without any reference to the hour, the day, or the season." As with the novel approach to prayer generally in the monastic orders, as discussed by Grisbrooke, 359-360, this arrangement for "praying" the psalms was not originally intended for use in corporate worship but primarily as an instrument "to inculcate in the monk the discipline of continuous prayer: in other words they were not forms of corporate

worship, but forms of private prayer to be practiced in common.” On the Protestant side, the continuous reading of the Psalms was indeed adapted for use in corporate worship, as, for example, in the *Book of Praise: Anglo Genevan Psalter* 1984, of the Canadian Reformed Church, in which an English version of each of the 150 psalms is keyed to one of the 124 tunes in the 1562 edition of the Genevan Psalter (French). The *Palter Hymnal* 1987, of the Christian Reformed Church, has versifications and musical settings of all 150 Psalms, including some of the tunes from the Genevan Psalter. And, *The Psalms, A New Translation: Singing Version* 1963 has a new translation from the Hebrew of each of the 150 psalms arranged to the psalmody (psalm tunes) of Joseph Gelineau. Other more selective psalm singing resources may also be drawn upon when singing through all the psalms continuously. Such a schedule might lend itself to placing the psalm or portions at various appropriate points in the worship service for responses of praise, lament, intercession, supplication, thanksgiving, or reflection, depending on the theme and mood of the psalm of the day rather than always using the psalm as a response to the first (Old Testament) reading. I mentioned above in reference to my “Final Four” example at the end of Chapter V in Book I the suggestion of having the Psalm of the day voiced by the whole assembly immediately after the Call to Worship which is based on a portion of the Psalm of the Day. Any approach to the use of the psalms in worship services should be arranged and executed thoughtfully so as to avoid the criticism which, according to Thompson 1971, 318-319, was leveled at the *Prayer Books* by the 16th century English Puritans, that the Order of Service was a “confusion” with the psalms being “tossed in like tennice balles.” The approach of singing through the book of Psalms continuously from Sunday to Sunday can also be supported by the wealth of Psalter resources on the market, especially those with a canonical index to the psalms. Singing through all of the psalms in course renders inoperative the permission granted by N. T.

Wright 2006, 152, for some congregations to omit from worship services any “hard” psalms that they “cannot use in good conscience.” I discuss the use of hard texts in n. 17 and elsewhere.

Shepherd 1976a, 11, indicates that the Psalms are suited to either responsive reading or responsorial singing because each verse contains a complete thought. He also notes, 38, that the responsorial psalm in worship might have been taken over from the synagogue but could have been deduced from a number of the psalms. He also describes, 62, how responsive (the two choirs alternating verses) and responsorial (antiphons between verses) singing were combined in the Benedictine and other religious communities. Shepherd 1976a, 89, 116, n. 136, criticizes the practice reflected in the hymnals of some churches (in the “Protestant liturgical paradigm” per West 1997) where the psalms are read responsively rather than sung antiphonally, of dividing the psalms at the half verse rather than verse by verse, so that respondents are completing each other’s thoughts rather than adding to or answering them. This is a significant observation even while being an example of the world-renowned fussiness within the guild of liturgiologists. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer 1954, 48-49, sees the parallelism, or paraphrastic repetition, within each verse as the clue or hint that at least two people are praying and that “the psalms teach us to pray as a fellowship.” So perhaps those verse-splitting responsive readings in some of the older Protestant hymnals were not so liturgically gauche after all.

[¶4] Either of the above two approaches, selecting a psalm as a response to the Old Testament reading or going through the book of Psalms continuously, can be used in the Christological part of the year, Advent to Pentecost, with principal readings from a Gospel, and with a *lectio continua de scriptura* course on a New Testament Epistle, Acts, or Revelation in the summer and on a book of the Old Testament in the fall as the principal or controlling readings.

CHAPTER VII

Psalm of the Day Liturgical Prompts

[¶1] Whether the psalm for Sunday service is selected as a thematic correlate to the Old Testament reading or scheduled as part of a continuous cycle through the Book of Psalms or in some other way, some worship leaders and planners might find it helpful and edifying to use spoken liturgical texts such as Call to Worship, Call to Confession, Words of Grace and Healing, and Call for Offerings, that are based on the psalm selection of the day. Such are provided below for each psalm, psalm portion, or combination of psalms, which together comprehend the 150 psalms in the Book of Psalms. The numbers are those of the translation used: the New Revised Standard Version. Shepherd 1976a, 29, n. 37 (p. 107), discusses the background of the divergent numbering systems of the psalms in modern translations of the Bible. Old 1998b, 455, wrote “the canonical book of Psalms is our oldest collection of liturgical texts, and it was no doubt collected to serve that purpose.” Here, some of the texts are not quotations or even paraphrases of the psalm verses cited but rather use some of the words and phrases of the psalm verses to formulate the desired liturgical statement. In a few instances, the liturgical text that I have written says something that is contrary to the meaning of the psalm verse. For example, see the Call to Confession based on Psalm 24:4, where I have transmuted the promise of blessing for those who have clean hands and a pure heart into a caution against the sin of pride in thinking that one has clean hands and a pure heart. It seems the biblical writers and scribes themselves did not hesitate to make such flexible use of familiar scriptural phrases. Kaiser 1983, 241, sees several such changes of referent in Isaiah 10:20, including the transfer of the phrase ‘him who smote them’ from the outstretched hand of Yahweh, as in Isaiah 9:13, to the world power of Assyria. Since

the word of God is “living and active,” i.e., performative (Hebrews 4:12), we should not be surprised to find examples of intertextuality, a modern literary concept (which I discuss in Book I, Chapter IV and in n. 19 and which I reference passim) and examples of the repurposing of texts which the modern discipline of canonical criticism (which I discuss in Book I, Chapter I and reference passim) identifies as an active function of Christian communities in the developmental phase of the canonical process.

[¶2] The practice of making the reading or singing of psalms a regular part of the Sunday worship service and using psalm verses as liturgical prompts should not be construed as eliminating the possibility or need of choosing the book of Psalms for a *lectio continua de scriptura* series of reading and preaching during the fall quarter of the year, recurring to Psalms at that time each year until the entire book of Psalms has been read and expounded. Bonhoeffer 1954, 44, affirms that the Psalter is at the same time God’s Word to people and also the prayers and songs of people to God. There is a long and honorable history in the pre Reformation church and the post-Reformation church of preaching from the psalms. Long 1989, 43-52, has a chapter “Preaching on the Psalms” where he cites some useful works on the poetry of the psalms.

[¶3] In addition to the resources on the study and liturgical use of the psalms cited above, the following bibliographies may be consulted: Holbert, Kimbrough, Young 1992, 269-270, has a helpful Selected Bibliography classified as follows: I. Critical Study of the Psalms, II. Psalm Collections, III. Singing the Psalms. Shepherd 1976a, 118-128, has a bibliography classified as: A. The Study of the Psalter: Translations, Introductions, Commentaries, Special Studies, Christian use of the Psalms; B. Musical Settings Old and New: Plainsong, including Complete Psalters (without antiphons) and Psalms for Seasonal and Sunday Propers (with antiphons);

Harmonized Chants; Harmonized Metrical Psalmody; “Gelineau” Psalmody; Psalmody based on Gelineau; Mixed Types. Additional resources are cited passim in the text and notes of Shepherd 1976a.

Psalm 1

CALL TO WORSHIP: HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LAW OF THE LORD (Psalm 1:1b, 2a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WATCHES OVER THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS BUT THE WAY OF THE WICKED WILL PERISH (Psalm 1:6).
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE RIGHTEOUS ARE LIKE TREES PLANTED BY STREAMS OF WATER (Psalm 1:3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE MADE RIGHTEOUS IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE RIGHTEOUS ARE LIKE TREES ... WHICH YIELD THEIR FRUIT IN DUE SEASON (Psalm 1:3). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 2

CALL TO WORSHIP: HAPPY ARE ALL WHO TAKE
REFUGE IN THE LORD (Psalm 2:12d). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: ASK OF THE LORD AND HE WILL MAKE THE NATIONS
YOUR HERITAGE AND THE ENDS OF THE EARTH YOUR POSSESSION (Psalm 2:8).
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD SHALL
BREAK THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AND DASH THEM IN PIECES LIKE A POTTER'S
VESSEL (Psalm 2:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS
CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: SERVE THE LORD WITH FEAR,
WITH TREMBLING KISS HIS FEET (Psalm 2:11,12a). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE
MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 3

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS A SHIELD AROUND US, OUR GLORY, AND THE ONE WHO LIFTS UP OUR HEADS. WE CRY ALOUD TO THE LORD, AND HE ANSWERS US FROM HIS HOLY HILL (Psalm 3:3-4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: DELIVERANCE BELONGS TO THE LORD (Psalm 3:8a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: RISE UP, O LORD! DELIVER US, O OUR GOD (Psalm 3:7a)! GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE LIE DOWN AND SLEEP; WE WAKE AGAIN, FOR THE LORD SUSTAINS US. WE ARE NOT AFRAID OF TEN THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE SET THEMSELVES AGAINST US ALL AROUND (Psalm 3:5-6). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 4

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS SET APART THE FAITHFUL FOR HIMSELF; THE LORD HEARS WHEN WE CALL TO HIM (Ps. 4:3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: HOW LONG, YOU PEOPLE, SHALL THE LORD'S HONOR SUFFER SHAME? HOW LONG WILL YOU LOVE VAIN WORDS, AND SEEK AFTER LIES (Ps. 4:2)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WE MAY LIE DOWN AND SLEEP IN PEACE; FOR GOD ALONE, THE LORD, MAKES US LIE DOWN IN SAFETY (Ps. 4:8). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: OFFER RIGHT SACRIFICES, AND PUT YOUR TRUST IN THE LORD (Ps. 4:5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 5

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET ALL WHO TAKE REFUGE IN THE LORD REJOICE;
LET THEM EVER SING FOR JOY (Psalm 5:11a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS NOT A GOD WHO DELIGHTS IN
WICKEDNESS; EVIL WILL NOT SOJOURN WITH OUR GOD (Psalm 5:4). LET US
CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BUT WE, THROUGH THE ABUNDANCE OF
GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE, WILL ENTER THE LORD'S HOUSE (Psalm 5:7a). GOOD
NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: IN THE MORNING, THE LORD HEARS OUR VOICE; IN
THE MORNING WE PREPARE A SACRIFICE FOR THE LORD, AND WATCH (Psalm 5:3).
LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 6

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD DOES NOT REBUKE US IN ANGER OR DISCIPLINE US IN WRATH. THE LORD IS GRACIOUS TO US WHEN WE ARE LANGUISHING; THE LORD HEALS US WHEN OUR BONES ARE SHAKING WITH TERROR (Psalm 6:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL TURN AND SAVE OUR LIFE; THE LORD WILL DELIVER US FOR THE SAKE OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 6:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: DEPART FROM US, ALL THE WORKINGS OF EVIL, FOR THE LORD HAS HEARD THE SOUND OF OUR WEeping. THE LORD HAS HEARD OUR SUPPLICATION; THE LORD ACCEPTS OUR PRAYER (Psalm 6:8-9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: ALL THE OLD ENEMIES THAT WOULD CAST US DOWN AND MAKE US DESPAIR HAVE BEEN STRUCK WITH TERROR. THE LORD HAS TURNED THEM BACK, AND IN A MOMENT HAS PUT THEM TO SHAME (Psalm 6:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 7

CALL TO WORSHIP: GIVE TO THE LORD THE THANKS DUE TO HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. SING PRAISE TO THE NAME OF THE LORD, THE MOST HIGH (Ps. 7: 17). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD JUDGES THE PEOPLES; YOU JUDGE US, O LORD, ACCORDING TO OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ACCORDING TO THE INTEGRITY THAT IS IN US (Ps. 7:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD IS RIGHTEOUS AND TESTS THE MINDS AND THE HEARTS. GOD LETS THE EVIL OF THE WICKED COME TO AN END, BUT ESTABLISHES THE RIGHTEOUS (Psalm 7:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: GOD IS OUR SHIELD, WHO SAVES THE UPRIGHT IN HEART (Ps. 7:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 8

CALL TO WORSHIP: O LORD, OUR SOVEREIGN, HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME IN ALL THE EARTH (Psalm 8:1)! LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WHAT ARE HUMAN BEINGS THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF THEM, MORTALS THAT YOU CARE FOR THEM (Psalm 8:4)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: YET YOU HAVE MADE THEM A LITTLE LOWER THAN GOD, AND CROWNED THEM WITH GLORY AND HONOR (Psalm 8:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: YOU HAVE FOUNDED A BULWARK BECAUSE OF YOUR FOES, TO SILENCE THE ENEMY AND THE AVENGER (Psalm 8:2b). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 9

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD WITH OUR WHOLE HEART; LET US TELL OF ALL GOD'S WONDERFUL DEEDS. LET US BE GLAD AND EXULT IN THE LORD; LET US SING PRAISE TO THE NAME OF THE MOST HIGH (Ps. 9:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD SITS ENTHRONED FOREVER, HE HAS ESTABLISHED HIS THRONE FOR JUDGMENT. THE LORD JUDGES THE WORLD WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS; HE JUDGES THE PEOPLES WITH EQUITY (Ps. 9:7-8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS A STRONGHOLD FOR THE OPPRESSED, A STRONGHOLD IN TIMES OF TROUBLE (Psalm 9:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THOSE WHO KNOW THE LORD'S NAME PUT THEIR TRUST IN HIM, FOR THE LORD HAS NOT FORSAKEN THOSE WHO SEEK HIM (Psalm 9:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 10

CALL TO WORSHIP: BREAK THE ARM OF THE WICKED AND EVILDOERS; SEEK OUT THEIR WICKEDNESS UNTIL YOU FIND NONE. THE LORD IS KING FOREVER AND EVER; THE NATIONS SHALL PERISH FROM HIS LAND (Psalm 10:15-16). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: RISE UP, O GOD; LIFT UP YOUR HAND; DO NOT FORGET THE OPPRESSED, OR THE WICKED WHO DEFY YOUR JUSTICE (Psalm 10:12-13). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BUT YOU DO SEE! INDEED YOU NOTE TROUBLE AND GRIEF, THAT YOU MAY TAKE IT INTO YOUR HANDS; THE HELPLESS COMMIT THEMSELVES TO YOU; YOU HAVE BEEN THE HELPER OF THE ORPHAN (Psalm 10:14). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: O LORD, YOU WILL HEAR THE DESIRE OF THE MEEK; YOU WILL STRENGTHEN THEIR HEART, YOU WILL INCLINE YOUR EAR TO DO JUSTICE FOR THE ORPHAN AND THE OPPRESSED, SO THAT THOSE FROM EARTH MAY STRIKE TERROR NO MORE (Psalm 10:17-18). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 11, 12

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE; THE LORD'S THRONE IS IN HEAVEN. HIS EYES BEHOLD, HIS GAZE EXAMINES HUMANKIND (Psalm 11:4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD TESTS THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED, AND HIS SOUL HATES THE LOVER OF VIOLENCE (Ps.11:5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD TO.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE PROMISES OF THE LORD ARE PROMISES THAT ARE PURE, SILVER REFINED IN A FURNACE ON THE GROUND, PURIFIED SEVEN TIMES (Psalm 12:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FOR THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS; HE LOVES RIGHTEOUS DEEDS; THE UPRIGHT SHALL BEHOLD HIS FACE (Ps. 11:7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 13, 14

CALL TO WORSHIP: BUT I TRUSTED IN YOUR STEADFAST LOVE; MY HEART SHALL REJOICE IN YOUR SALVATION. I WILL SING TO THE LORD, BECAUSE HE HAS DEALT BOUNTIFULLY WITH ME (Psalm 13:5-6). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD LOOKS DOWN FROM HEAVEN ON HUMANKIND TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY WHO ARE WISE. WHO SEEK AFTER GOD (Psalm 14:2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: O THAT DELIVERANCE FOR ISRAEL WOULD COME FROM ZION! WHEN THE LORD RESTORES THE FORTUNES OF HIS PEOPLE. JACOB WILL REJOICE; ISRAEL WILL BE GLAD (Psalm 14:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: SOME WOULD CONFOUND THE PLANS OF THE POOR. BUT THE LORD IS THEIR REFUGE (Psalm 14:6). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

Psalms 15, 16

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD SHOWS US THE PATH OF LIFE. IN GOD'S PRESENCE THERE IS FULLNESS OF JOY; IN THE LORD'S RIGHT HAND ARE PLEASURES FOREVERMORE (Psalm 16:11). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL PROTECT US WHEN WE TAKE REFUGE IN GOD, WHEN WE SAY TO THE LORD, "YOU ARE OUR GOD; WE HAVE NO GOOD APART FROM YOU" (Psalm 16:1-2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: OUR HEARTS ARE GLAD, AND OUR SOULS REJOICE; OUR BODIES ALSO REST SECURE. FOR THE LORD DOES NOT GIVE US UP TO SHEOL, OR LET HIS FAITHFUL ONES SEE THE PIT (Psalm 16:9-10). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD IS OUR CHOSEN PORTION AND OUR CUP; THE LORD HOLDS OUR LOT. THE BOUNDARY LINES HAVE FALLEN FOR US IN PLEASANT PLACES; WE HAVE A GOODLY HERITAGE (Psalm 16:5-6). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 17

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD WILL HEAR OUR CAUSE, AND WILL PAY ATTENTION TO OUR VOICE; THE LORD WILL GIVE EAR TO OUR HONEST AND STRAIGHT FORWARD PRAYERS (Ps. 17:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL WONDROUSLY SHOW US STEADFAST LOVE AND WILL SAVE US WHEN WE SEEK REFUGE FROM ALL OUR DANGERS IN HIM (Ps 17:7). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD RISES UP TO CONFRONT ALL OF OUR SPIRITUAL ENEMIES, BOTH INWARD AND OUTWARD. THE LORD OVERTHROWS ALL THE POWERS THAT WOULD PULL US DOWN AND DELIVERS OUR LIFE FROM ALL EVIL (Ps 17:1-4). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD GUARDS US AS THE APPLE OF THE EYE AND HIDES US IN THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS (Ps. 17:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 18:1-15

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE CALL UPON THE LORD, WHO IS WORTHY TO BE PRAISED, SO SHALL WE BE SAVED FROM ALL THAT WOULD DEFEAT US (Psalm 18:3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IN OUR DISTRESS, WE CALL UPON THE LORD; TO OUR GOD, WE CRY FOR HELP (Psalm 18:6a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD TO.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FROM HIS TEMPLE, THE LORD HEARS OUR VOICE, AND OUR CRY TO HIM HAS REACHED HIS EARS (Psalm 18:6b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD IS OUR ROCK, OUR FORTRESS, AND OUR DELIVERER, OUR GOD, OUR ROCK IN WHOM WE TAKE REFUGE, OUR SHIELD, AND THE HORN OF OUR SALVATION, OUR STRONGHOLD (Psalm 18:2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 18:16-30

CALL TO WORSHIP: THIS GOD---HIS WAY IS PERFECT; THE PROMISE OF THE LORD PROVES TRUE: HE IS A SHIELD FOR ALL WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM (Psalm 18:30). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD REACHED DOWN FROM ON HIGH, HE TOOK US; HE DREW US OUT OF MIGHTY WATERS. HE DELIVERED US FROM GREAT DANGERS, AND FROM THOSE WHO WOULD DESTROY US; FOR THEY WERE TOO MIGHTY FOR US (Psalm 18:16-17). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: MANY OBSTACLES AND DANGERS CONFRONTED US IN THE DAY OF OUR CALAMITY; BUT THE LORD WAS OUR SUPPORT. HE BROUGHT US OUT INTO A BROAD PLACE; HE DELIVERED US, BECAUSE HE DELIGHTED IN US (Psalm 18:18-19). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS IT IS THE LORD WHO LIGHTS OUR LAMP; THE LORD, OUR GOD LIGHTS UP OUR DARKNESS (Psalm 18:28). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 18:31-50

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD LIVES! BLESSED BE THE ROCK, AND EXALTED BE THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION (Ps. 18:46). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WHO IS GOD EXCEPT THE LORD? AND WHO IS A ROCK BESIDES OUR GOD (Psalm 18:31)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS DELIVERED US FROM OUR ENEMIES, BOTH WITHIN AND WITHOUT (Ps. 18:48a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS GOD HAS GIVEN US THE SHIELD OF SALVATION, AND THE LORD'S RIGHT HAND HAS SUPPORTED US (Ps. 18:35a, b). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 19

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE HEAVENS ARE TELLING
THE GLORY OF GOD; AND THE DOME OF THE SKY PROCLAIMS HIS HANDIWORK
(Ps. 19:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: BUT WHO CAN DETECT THEIR OWN ERRORS? CLEAR
ME FROM HIDDEN FAULTS. KEEP BACK YOUR SERVANT ALSO FROM PROUD
THOUGHTS; DO NOT LET THEM HAVE DOMINION OVER ME (Ps. 19: 12, 13). LET US
CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING THEN I SHALL BE BLAMELESS, AND
INNOCENT OF GREAT TRANSGRESSION (Ps. 19:13b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE
FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS THE ORDINANCES OF THE LORD ARE TRUE AND
RIGHTEOUS ALTOGETHER. MORE TO BE DESIRED ARE THEY THAN GOLD, EVEN
MUCH FINE GOLD; SWEETER ALSO THAN HONEY, AND DRIPPINGS OF THE
HONEYCOMB (Ps. 19:9b-10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S
CHURCH.

Psalm 20

CALL TO WORSHIP: SOME TAKE PRIDE IN CHARIOTS, AND SOME IN HORSES, BUT OUR PRIDE IS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD OUR GOD (Ps. 20:7).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL ANSWER US IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE! THE NAME OF THE GOD OF JACOB WILL PROTECT US (Ps. 20: 1)! LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING THE LORD WILL SEND US HELP FROM THE SANCTUARY, AND GIVE US SUPPORT FROM ZION (Ps. 20:2). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS THE LORD WILL REMEMBER ALL OUR OFFERINGS, AND REGARD WITH FAVOR OUR SACRIFICES (Ps. 20:3). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 21

CALL TO WORSHIP: BE EXALTED, O LORD, IN YOUR STRENGTH! WE WILL SING AND PRAISE YOUR POWER (Psalm 21:13). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD BESTOWS ON US BLESSINGS FOREVER; HE MAKES US GLAD WITH THE JOY OF HIS PRESENCE (Ps. 21:6).
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FOR WE TRUST IN THE LORD AND THROUGH THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE MOST HIGH, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED (Psalm 21:7) GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.
AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: YOU HAVE GIVEN US OUR HEARTS' DESIRE, AND HAVE NOT WITHHELD THE REQUEST OF OUR LIPS (Psalm 21:2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 22

CALL TO WORSHIP: YOU WHO FEAR THE LORD, PRAISE HIM! ALL YOU
OFFSPRING OF JACOB, GLORIFY HIM; STAND IN AWE OF HIM, ALL YOU
OFFSPRING OF ISRAEL (Psalm 22:23)! LET US WORSHIP GOD!

CALL TO CONFESSION: COMMIT YOUR CAUSE TO THE LORD; LET HIM
DELIVER -- LET HIM RESCUE THE ONE IN WHOM HE DELIGHTS (Ps. 22:8)!
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: OUR ANCESTORS TRUSTED IN GOD;
THEY TRUSTED AND GOD DELIVERED THEM (Psalm 22:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE
FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FROM THE LORD COMES OUR PRAISE IN THE GREAT
CONGREGATION; OUR VOWS WE WILL PAY BEFORE THOSE WHO FEAR GOD
(Psalm 22:25). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 23

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, WE SHALL NOT WANT (Ps. 23:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: EVEN THOUGH WE MAY WALK THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEYS OF SIN, WE ARE TO FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD IS WITH US (Ps. 23:4a, b). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD RESTORES OUR SOULS. HE LEADS US IN RIGHT PATHS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE (Ps. 23:3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD PREPARES A TABLE BEFORE US IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR ENEMIES, HE ANOINTS OUR HEADS WITH OIL; OUR CUPS OVERFLOW (Ps. 23:5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 24

CALL TO WORSHIP: WHO SHALL ASCEND TO THE HILL OF THE LORD: AND WHO SHALL STAND IN HIS HOLY PLACE (Psalm 24:3)? LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY HAVE CLEAN HANDS AND PURE HEARTS SHOULD ADMIT TO THE SIN OF PRIDE AND SELF DELUSION (Psalm 24:4)! LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THEY WILL RECEIVE BLESSING FROM THE LORD, AND VINDICATION FROM THE GOD OF THEIR SALVATION (Ps. 24:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND ALL THAT IS IN IT, THE WORLD, AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN IT; FOR HE HAS FOUNDED IT ON THE SEAS, AND ESTABLISHED IT ON THE RIVERS (Ps.24:1-2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 25

CALL TO WORSHIP: TO YOU, O LORD, WE LIFT UP OUR SOULS. O OUR GOD,
IN YOU WE TRUST (Psalm 25:1, 2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOOD AND UPRIGHT IS THE LORD; THEREFORE HE
INSTRUCTS SINNERS IN THE WAY. HE LEADS THE HUMBLE IN WHAT IS RIGHT,
AND TEACHES THE HUMBLE HIS WAY (Psalm 25:8-9). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN
AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BE MINDFUL OF YOUR MERCY, O LORD,
AND OF YOUR STEADFAST LOVE, FOR THEY HAVE BEEN FROM OF OLD. FOR
YOUR NAME'S SAKE, O LORD, PARDON OUR GUILT, FOR IT IS GREAT (Ps. 25, 6, 11).
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WHO ARE THEY THAT FEAR THE LORD: HE WILL
TEACH THEM THE WAY THAT THEY SHOULD CHOOSE. THEY WILL ABIDE IN
PROSPERITY, AND THEIR CHILDREN SHALL POSSESS THE LAND (Ps.25:12-13). LET
US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 26

CALL TO WORSHIP: SING ALOUD A SONG OF THANKSGIVING, AND TELL ALL OF GOD'S WONDROUS DEEDS (Psalm 26:7). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE WALK IN THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD (Psalm 26:3b). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD'S STEADFAST LOVE IS BEFORE OUR EYES (Ps. 26:3a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THIS IS THE HOUSE IN WHICH THE LORD DWELLS AND IN WHICH GOD'S GLORY ABIDES (Ps. 26:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 27

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION; WHOM SHALL I FEAR? THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD OF MY LIFE; OF WHOM SHALL I BE AFRAID (Ps.27:1)? [Or use Verse 4] LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION; WHOM SHALL I FEAR (Ps. 27:1)? [Or: use Verse 2 or 7 or 8, 9a or 9 or 10 or 13] LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION; WHOM SHALL I FEAR (Ps. 27:1)? [Or: Verse 5 or 10] GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD OF OUR LIVES (Ps. 27:1b). [Or: Verse 6, or Verse 13] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 28

CALL TO WORSHIP: TO YOU, O LORD, WE CALL; OUR ROCK, DO NOT REFUSE TO HEAR US, FOR IF YOU ARE SILENT TO US, WE SHALL BE LIKE THOSE WHO GO DOWN TO THE PIT (Psalm 28:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE; HE IS THE SAVING REFUGE OF HIS ANOINTED (Ps.28:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BLESSED BE THE LORD, FOR HE HAS HEARD THE SOUND OF OUR PLEADINGS (Ps.28:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH AND OUR SHIELD; IN HIM OUR HEARTS TRUST; SO WE ARE HELPED, AND OUR HEARTS EXULT, AND WITH OUR SONG WE GIVE THANKS TO HIM (Ps. 28:7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 29

CALL TO WORSHIP: ASCRIBE TO THE LORD THE GLORY OF HIS NAME;
WORSHIP THE LORD IN HOLY SPLENDOR (Psalm 29:2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE VOICE OF THE LORD IS OVER THE WATERS; THE
GOD OF GLORY THUNDERS, THE LORD, OVER MIGHTY WATERS (Ps. 29:3). LET US
CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE VOICE OF THE LORD IS POWERFUL;
THE VOICE OF THE LORD IS FULL OF MAJESTY (Ps. 29:4). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE
FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD SITS ENTHRONED OVER THE FLOOD; THE
LORD SITS ENTHRONED AS KING FOREVER (Ps.29:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR
THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 30

CALL TO WORSHIP: SING PRAISES TO THE LORD, O YOU HIS FAITHFUL ONES, AND GIVE THANKS TO HIS HOLY NAME (Ps.30:4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD'S ANGER IS BUT FOR A MOMENT; HIS FAVOR IS FOR A LIFETIME (Ps. 30:5a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WEEPING MAY LINGER FOR THE NIGHT, BUT JOY COMES WITH THE MORNING (Psalm 30:5b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS TURNED OUR MOURNING INTO DANCING; HE HAS TAKEN OFF OUR SACK CLOTH AND CLOTHED US WITH JOY (Ps. 30: 11)! LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 31

CALL TO WORSHIP: BLESSED BE THE LORD, FOR HE HAS WONDROUSLY SHOWN HIS STEADFAST LOVE TO US WHEN WE WERE BESET AS A CITY UNDER SIEGE (Ps. 31:21). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD HAS STORED UP ABUNDANT GOODNESS FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM (Ps. 31:19a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS ACCOMPLISHED GOOD IN THE SIGHT OF EVERYONE FOR THOSE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM (Ps. 31:19b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: GOD HIDES US FROM ALL HUMAN DANGERS IN THE SHELTER OF HIS PRESENCE (Ps. 31:20a). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 32

CALL TO WORSHIP: BE GLAD IN THE LORD AND REJOICE, O RIGHTEOUS, AND SHOUT FOR JOY, ALL YOU UPRIGHT IN HEART (Psalm 32:11). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THEREFORE, LET ALL WHO ARE FAITHFUL OFFER PRAYER TO THE LORD; AT A TIME OF DISTRESS, THE RUSH OF MIGHTY WATERS SHALL NOT REACH THEM (Psalm 32:6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS A HIDING PLACE FOR US; THE LORD PRESERVES US FROM TROUBLE; THE LORD SURROUNDS US WITH GLAD CRIES OF DELIVERANCE (Psalm 32:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: HAPPY ARE THOSE WHOSE TRANSGRESSION IS FORGIVEN, WHOSE SIN IS COVERED (Psalm 32: 1). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 33

CALL TO WORSHIP: REJOICE IN THE LORD, O YOU RIGHTEOUS. PRAISE BEFITS THE UPRIGHT. PRAISE THE LORD WITH THE LYRE; MAKE MELODY TO HIM WITH THE HARP OF TEN STRINGS. SING TO HIM A NEW SONG; PLAY SKILLFULLY ON THE STRINGS, WITH LOUD SHOUTS (Psalm 33:1-3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: LET ALL THE EARTH FEAR THE LORD; LET ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE WORLD STAND IN AWE OF HIM, FOR HE SPOKE, AND IT CAME TO BE; HE COMMANDED, AND IT STOOD FIRM (Psalm 33:8-9). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: TRULY THE EYE OF THE LORD ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM, ON THOSE WHO HOPE IN HIS STEADFAST LOVE, TO DELIVER THEIR SOUL FROM DEATH, AND TO KEEP THEM ALIVE IN FAMINE (Psalm 33:18-19). GOOD NEWS: WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FOR THE WORD OF THE LORD IS UPRIGHT, AND ALL HIS WORK IS DONE IN FAITHFULNESS, HE LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE; THE EARTH IS FULL OF THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD (Psalm 33:4-5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 34

CALL TO WORSHIP: O MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME, AND LET US EXALT HIS NAME TOGETHER (Ps. 34:3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WHEN WE SEEK THE LORD, HE ANSWERS US, AND DELIVERS US FROM ALL OUR FEARS (Psalm 34:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WE LOOK TO THE LORD AND WE ARE RADIANT; OUR FACES SHALL NEVER BE ASHAMED (Psalm 34:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD IS NEAR TO THE BROKENHEARTED, AND SAVES THE CRUSHED IN SPIRIT (Psalm 34:18). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 35

CALL TO WORSHIP: OUR SOUL SHALL REJOICE IN THE LORD, EXULTING IN HIS DELIVERANCE. ALL OUR BONES SHALL SAY, "O LORD, WHO IS LIKE YOU?" (Ps. 35:9, 10a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD DELIVERS THE WEAK FROM THOSE TOO STRONG FOR THEM, THE WEAK AND NEEDY FROM THOSE WHO DESPOIL THEM (Ps..35:10 b, c). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD VINDICATES US ACCORDING TO HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS (Psalm 35:24a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD RESCUES US FROM THE RAVAGES OF THOSE WHO WOULD DESTROY US. HE SAVES US FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE LIONS. LET US THANK THE LORD IN THE GREAT CONGREGATION; LET US GIVE PRAISE TO GOD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD (Psalm 35:17b-18). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 36

CALL TO WORSHIP: HOW PRECIOUS IS THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD! ALL PEOPLE MAY TAKE REFUGE IN THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS. FOR WITH GOD IS THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE; IN HIS LIGHT WE SEE LIGHT (Psalm 36:7, 9). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LORD IS LIKE THE MIGHTY MOUNTAINS, HIS JUDGMENTS ARE LIKE THE GREAT DEEP; HE SAVES HUMANS AND ANIMALS ALIKE (Psalm 36:6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD EXTENDS TO THE HEAVENS, HIS FAITHFULNESS TO THE CLOUDS (Psalm 36:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: HOW PRECIOUS IS THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD! ALL PEOPLE MAY TAKE REFUGE IN THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS. THEY FEAST ON THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS HOUSE, AND HE GIVES THEM DRINK FROM THE RIVER OF HIS DELIGHTS (Psalm 36:7-8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 37

CALL TO WORSHIP: TRUST IN THE LORD, AND DO GOOD; SO YOU WILL LIVE IN THE LAND, AND ENJOY SECURITY. TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LORD, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART (Psalm 37:3-4). [Or Verses 3-5] LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: COMMIT YOUR WAY TO THE LORD; TRUST IN HIM, AND HE WILL ACT (Psalm 37:5). [Or Verses 23-24] LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HE WILL MAKE YOUR VINDICATION SHINE LIKE THE LIGHT, AND THE JUSTICE OF YOUR CAUSE LIKE THE NOONDAY (Psalm 37:6). [Or Verses 27-28, or Verse 40 or Verses 27-28, 40]
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: BETTER IS A LITTLE THAT THE RIGHTEOUS PERSON HAS THAN THE ABUNDANCE OF MANY WICKED (Ps. 37:16). [or Verses 16-17 or Verses 25-26] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 38

CALL TO WORSHIP: IT IS FOR THE LORD THAT WE
MUST WAIT; IT IS THE LORD OUR GOD WHO WILL ANSWER US (Psalm 38:15).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL NOT FORSAKE US; OUR GOD IS NOT
FAR FROM US (Psalm 38:21). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD MAKES HASTE TO HELP US,
THE LORD IS OUR SALVATION (Psalm 38:22). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND
MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: AND NOW, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR: OUR HOPE
IS IN THE LORD (Psalm 39:7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S
CHURCH.

Psalm 39

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS MADE OUR DAYS A FEW
HANDBREADTHS, AND OUR LIFETIME IS AS NOTHING IN GOD'S SIGHT. SURELY
EVERY ONE STANDS AS A MERE BREATH (Psalm 39:5). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD CHASTISES MORTALS IN PUNISHMENT
FOR SIN, CONSUMING LIKE A MOTH WHAT IS DEAR TO THEM; SURELY
EVERYONE IS A MERE BREATH (Psalm 39:11). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND
BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD DELIVERS US FROM ALL OUR
TRANSGRESSIONS. HE DOES NOT MAKE US THE SCORN OF FOOLS (Psalm 39:8).
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE ARE PASSING GUESTS OF THE LORD, ALIENS,
LIKE ALL OUR FOREBEARS (Psalm 39: 12b). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION
OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 40

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD DREW US UP FROM THE DESOLATE PIT, OUT OF THE MIRY BOG, AND SET OUR FEET UPON A ROCK, MAKING OUR STEPS SECURE. THE LORD PUT A NEW SONG IN OUR MOUTH, A SONG OF PRAISE TO OUR GOD. MANY WILL SEE AND FEAR, AND PUT THEIR TRUST IN THE LORD (Psalm 40:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL NOT WITHHOLD HIS MERCY FROM US; HIS STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS WILL KEEP US SAFE FOREVER (Psalm 40:11). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS PLEASED TO DELIVER US; THE LORD MAKES HASTE TO HELP US (Psalm 40:13). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD DOES NOT DESIRE SACRIFICE AND OFFERING, BUT HE HAS GIVEN US AN OPEN EAR. BURNT OFFERING AND SIN OFFERING HE HAS NOT REQUIRED. HERE WE ARE; IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF US. WE DELIGHT TO DO THE LORD'S WILL. HIS LAW IS WITHIN OUR HEARTS (Psalm 40:6-8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 41

CALL TO WORSHIP: BLESSED BE THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING (Psalm 41:13). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL BE GRACIOUS TO US AND HEAL US, FOR WE HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD (Psalm 41:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL BE GRACIOUS TO US, AND RAISE US UP (Psalm 41: 10). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO CONSIDER THE POOR, THE LORD DELIVERS THEM IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE (Psalm 41:1). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 42, 43

CALL TO WORSHIP: THESE THINGS I REMEMBER, AS I POUR OUT MY SOUL: HOW I WENT WITH THE THRONG, AND LED THEM IN PROCESSION TO THE HOUSE OF GOD, WITH GLAD SHOUTS AND SONGS OF THANKSGIVING, A MULTITUDE KEEPING FESTIVAL (Psalm 42:4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WHY ARE YOU CAST DOWN, O MY SOUL, AND WHY ARE YOU DISQUIETED WITHIN ME (Psalm 42:5a)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HOPE IN GOD; FOR I SHALL AGAIN PRAISE HIM, MY HELP AND MY GOD (Psalm 42:5b, 6a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: BY DAY THE LORD COMMANDS HIS STEADFAST LOVE, AND AT NIGHT HIS SONG IS WITH ME, A PRAYER TO THE GOD OF MY LIFE (Psalm 42:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 44

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS OUR KING AND OUR GOD. THE LORD COMMANDS VICTORIES FOR HIS PEOPLE (Psalm 44:4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD HAS NOT REJECTED OR HUMILIATED HIS PEOPLE. HE HAS NOT MADE US LIKE SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED, NOR HAS HE SCATTERED US AMONG THE PEOPLES (Psalm 44:9a, 11). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS SAVED US FROM OUR SINS AND HAS NOT CAST US OFF FOREVER (Psalm 44:7a, 23b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: IF WE BOAST, WE MUST BOAST OF THE LORD, AND WE WILL GIVE THANKS TO HIS NAME FOREVER (Psalm 44:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 45

CALL TO WORSHIP: SINCE THE KING IS YOUR LORD, BOW DOWN TO HIM
(Ps. 45:11b). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE KING LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATES
WICKEDNESS (Psalm 45:7a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD, OUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED US WITH
THE OIL OF GLADNESS BEYOND OUR COMPANIONS (Psalm 45:7b). GOOD NEWS! WE
ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE PEOPLE OF TYRE WILL SEEK THE KING'S FAVOR
WITH GIFTS, THE RICHEST OF THE PEOPLE WITH ALL KINDS OF WEALTH (Ps.
45:12). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 46

CALL TO WORSHIP: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD! THE LORD IS EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS, THE LORD IS EXALTED IN THE EARTH (Psalm 46:10). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE (Psalm 46:1). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD OF HOSTS IS WITH US; THE GOD OF JACOB IS OUR REFUGE (Psalm 46:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THERE IS A RIVER WHOSE STREAMS MAKE GLAD THE CITY OF GOD, THE HOLY HABITATION OF THE MOST HIGH (Psalm 46:4). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 47

CALL TO WORSHIP: GOD IS THE KING OF ALL THE EARTH; SING PRAISES WITH A PSALM (Psalm 47:7). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD, THE MOST HIGH, IS AWESOME, A GREAT KING OVER ALL THE EARTH (Psalm 47:2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS GONE UP WITH A SHOUT, THE LORD WITH THE SOUND OF A TRUMPET (Psalm 47:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE PRINCES OF THE PEOPLES GATHER AS THE PEOPLE OF THE GOD OF ABRAHAM. FOR THE SHIELDS OF THE EARTH BELONG TO GOD; HE IS HIGHLY EXALTED (Psalm 47:9). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 48

CALL TO WORSHIP: GREAT IS THE LORD AND GREATLY TO BE PRAISED IN THE CITY OF OUR GOD. HIS HOLY MOUNTAIN, BEAUTIFUL IN ELEVATION, IS THE JOY OF ALL THE EARTH, MOUNT ZION, IN THE FAR NORTH, THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING (Psalm 48:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE PONDER THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD, IN THE MIDST OF GOD'S TEMPLE (Psalm 48:9). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE NAME OF THE LORD, LIKE GOD'S PRAISE, REACHES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. HIS RIGHT HAND IS FILLED WITH VICTORY (Psalm 48:10). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WALK ABOUT ZION, GO ALL AROUND IT, COUNT ITS TOWERS, CONSIDER WELL ITS RAMPARTS; GO THROUGH ITS CITADELS, THAT YOU MAY TELL THE NEXT GENERATION THAT THIS IS GOD, OUR GOD FOREVER AND EVER. HE WILL BE OUR GUIDE FOREVER (Psalm 48:12-14). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 49

CALL TO WORSHIP: HEAR THIS, ALL YOU PEOPLES; GIVE EAR, ALL INHABITANTS OF THE WORLD, BOTH LOW AND HIGH, RICH AND POOR TOGETHER. INCLINE YOUR EAR TO WISDOM; SOLVE YOUR RIDDLE TO THE MUSIC OF THE HARP (Psalm 49:1, 2, 4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: TRULY, NO RANSOM AVAILS FOR ONE'S LIFE, THERE IS NO PRICE ONE CAN GIVE TO GOD FOR IT (Psalm 49:7). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS RANSOMED OUR SOUL FROM THE POWER OF DEATH, FOR THE LORD ACCEPTS US (Psalm 49:15). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: DO NOT BE AFRAID WHEN SOME BECOME RICH, WHEN THE WEALTH OF THEIR HOUSES INCREASES. FOR WHEN THEY DIE THEY WILL CARRY NOTHING AWAY; THEIR WEALTH WILL NOT GO DOWN AFTER THEM (Psalm 49:16-17). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 50

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE MIGHTY ONE, GOD THE LORD, SPEAKS AND SUMMONS THE EARTH FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN TO ITS SETTING. OUT OF ZION, THE PERFECTION OF BEAUTY, GOD SHINES FORTH (Psalm 50:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: BUT TO THE WICKED GOD SAYS: "WHAT RIGHT HAVE YOU TO RECITE MY STATUES, OR TAKE MY COVENANT ON YOUR LIPS?" (Psalm 50:16). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL SHOW HIS SALVATION TO THOSE WHO BRING THANKSGIVING AS THEIR SACRIFICE TO HONOR GOD (Psalm 50:23). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: OFFER TO GOD A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING, AND PAY YOUR VOWS TO THE MOST HIGH (Psalm 50:14).
LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 51

CALL TO WORSHIP: O LORD, OPEN OUR LIPS, AND OUR MOUTHS WILL
DECLARE YOUR PRAISE (Ps. 51:15). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE KNOW OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, AND OUR SIN IS
EVER BEFORE US (Psalm 51:3). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO
GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE SACRIFICE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD IS
A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART, O GOD, YOU WILL NOT
DESPISE (Psalm 51:17). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN
JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: RESTORE TO US THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION, AND
SUSTAIN IN US A WILLING SPIRIT. THEN WE WILL TEACH TRANSGRESSORS YOUR
WAYS, AND SINNERS WILL RETURN TO YOU. DELIVER US FROM BLOODSHED, O
GOD, O GOD OF OUR SALVATION, AND OUR TONGUE WILL SING ALOUD OF YOUR
DELIVERANCE (Psalm 51:12-14) [or use only Verses 12-13]. LET US BRING GIFTS FOR
THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 52

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE ARE CALLED TO BE LIKE A GREEN OLIVE TREE IN THE HOUSE OF GOD, TRUSTING IN THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD FOREVER AND EVER (Psalm 52:8). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD WILL BREAK DOWN THE MIGHTY ONES FOREVER, THOSE WHO PLOT MISCHIEF AND PRESUME ON THE KINDNESS OF GOD (Psalm 52:5a, 1a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS DONE GOOD AND IS TO BE THANKED FOREVER. PROCLAIM GOD'S NAME IN THE PRESENCE OF THE FAITHFUL, FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD IS GOOD (Psalm 52:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: DO NOT TRUST IN ABUNDANCE OF RICHES OR SEEK REFUGE IN WEALTH, BUT TAKE REFUGE IN GOD (Psalm 52:7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 53, 54

CALL TO WORSHIP: GOD IS OUR HELPER; THE LORD IS THE UPHOLDER OF OUR LIFE (Psalm 54:4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD LOOKS DOWN FROM HEAVEN ON HUMANKIND TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY WHO ARE WISE, WHO SEEK AFTER GOD. THEY HAVE ALL FALLEN AWAY, THEY ARE ALL ALIKE PERVERSE; THERE IS NO ONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE (Psalm 53:2-3). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS DELIVERED US FROM TROUBLE, AND OUR EYES HAVE LOOKED IN TRIUMPH ON OUR SIN (Psalm 54:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WITH A FREEWILL OFFERING, LET US SACRIFICE TO GOD; GIVING THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR IT IS GOOD (Psalm 54:6). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 55

CALL TO WORSHIP: GOD DOES NOT HIDE HIMSELF FROM OUR SUPPLICATION; THE LORD GIVES EAR TO OUR PRAYER; HE ATTENDS TO US AND ANSWERS US (Psalm 55:1-2a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: CAST YOUR BURDEN ON THE LORD, AND HE WILL SUSTAIN YOU (Psalm 55:22a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN WE CALL UPON GOD, THE LORD WILL SAVE US (Psalm 55:22). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: GOD IS ENTHRONED FROM OF OLD. HE SEES OUR STRUGGLE WITH THE FORCES OF EVIL AND DESTRUCTION. THE LORD WILL REDEEM US UNHARMED FROM THE BATTLE THAT WE WAGE (Psalm 55:18-19). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 56

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE TRUST IN GOD WHOSE WORD WE PRAISE. WE ARE NOT AFRAID BECAUSE WE PRAISE THE WORD OF THE LORD (Psalm 56:10-11). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD HAS DELIVERED OUR SOUL FROM DEATH AND OUR FEET FROM FALLING (Psalm 56:13). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS DELIVERED US SO THAT WE MAY WALK BEFORE THE LORD IN THE LIGHT OF LIFE (Psalm 56:13b).
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE MUST PERFORM OUR VOWS TO GOD; AND RENDER THANK OFFERINGS TO HIM (Psalm 56:12). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 57, 58

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET GOD BE EXALTED ABOVE THE HEAVENS. LET HIS GLORY BE OVER ALL THE EARTH (Ps. 57:5). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: MAY GOD BE MERCIFUL TO US. OUR SOULS TAKE REFUGE IN HIM; IN THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS WE WILL TAKE REFUGE, UNTIL THE DESTROYING STORMS PASS BY (Psalm 57:1). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WE HAVE CRIED TO GOD MOST HIGH, TO GOD WHO FULFILLS HIS PURPOSE FOR US. HE HAS SENT FROM HEAVEN TO SAVE US ... GOD HAS SENT FORTH HIS STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS (Psalm 57:2-3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.
AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE WILL GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD AMONG THE PEOPLE; WE WILL SING PRAISES TO GOD AMONG THE NATIONS. FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE IS AS HIGH AS THE HEAVENS; HIS FAITHFULNESS EXTENDS TO THE CLOUDS (Ps. 57:9-10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 59

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE WILL SING OF GOD'S POWER; WE WILL SING ALOUD OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE IN THE MORNING. LET US SING PRAISES TO GOD OUR STRENGTH, FOR HE IS OUR FORTRESS, THE GOD WHO SHOWS US STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 59:16, 17). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: AT THE END OF THE DAY, OUR SINS AND WEAKNESSES ALWAYS COME BACK TO US, LIKE HOWLING DOGS PROWLING ABOUT THE CITY (Psalm 59:6, 14). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: OUR GOD IN HIS STEADFAST LOVE WILL MEET US; OUR GOD WILL LET US LOOK IN TRIUMPH UPON OUR SINS AND WEAKNESSES (Psalm 59:10). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS BEEN A FORTRESS FOR US AND A REFUGE IN THE DAY OF OUR DISTRESS, THE GOD WHO SHOWS US STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 59:16, 17). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 60, 61

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS GIVEN US THE HERITAGE OF THOSE WHO FEAR HIS NAME (Psalm 61:5b). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD WILL GRANT US HELP AGAINST THE FOE; HUMAN HELP IS WORTHLESS (Psalm 60:11). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WITH GOD'S HELP WE SHALL HAVE VICTORY OVER OUR SINS; IT IS HE WHO TREADS DOWN OUR FOES (Psalm 60:12). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE WILL ALWAYS SING PRAISES TO GOD'S NAME, AS WE PAY OUR VOWS DAY AFTER DAY (Psalm 61:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 62

CALL TO WORSHIP: FOR GOD ALONE OUR SOULS WAIT IN SILENCE; FROM HIM COMES OUR SALVATION. HE ALONE IS OUR ROCK AND OUR SALVATION, OUR FORTRESS (Psalm 62:1, 2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: TRUST IN THE LORD AT ALL TIMES, O PEOPLE; POUR OUT YOUR HEART BEFORE HIM. GOD IS A REFUGE FOR US (Psalm 62:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: ON GOD RESTS OUR DELIVERANCE AND OUR HONOR; OUR MIGHTY ROCK, OUR REFUGE IS IN GOD (Psalm 62:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: PUT NO CONFIDENCE IN EXTORTION, AND SET NO VAIN HOPES ON ROBBERY; IF RICHES INCREASE, DO NOT SET YOUR HEART ON THEM (Psalm 62:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 63, 64

CALL TO WORSHIP: BECAUSE THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD IS BETTER THAN LIFE, OUR LIPS WILL PRAISE HIM. SO WE WILL BLESS THE LORD AS LONG AS WE LIVE; WE WILL LIFT UP HANDS AND CALL UPON HIM (Psalm 63:3-4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL HIDE US FROM THE SECRET PLOTS OF OUR OWN SINFUL HEARTS; HE WILL PROTECT US FROM OUR OWN CUNNING SCHEMES (Psalm 64:2, 6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS SHOT HIS ARROW AT THE DREAD ENEMY; OUR WICKED SINFULNESS WHICH WOULD DESTROY US HAS SUDDENLY BEEN WOUNDED (Psalm 63:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: OUR SOUL IS SATISFIED AS WITH A RICH FEAST, AND OUR MOUTH PRAISES GOD WITH JOYFUL LIPS (Psalm 63:5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 65

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD CROWNS THE YEAR WITH HIS BOUNTY;
HIS WAGON TRACKS OVERFLOW WITH RICHNESS (Psalm 65:1). LET US WORSHIP
GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: BY AWESOME DEEDS THE LORD ANSWERS US WITH
DELIVERANCE, THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION; IS THE HOPE OF ALL THE ENDS OF
THE EARTH (Psalm 65:5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN DEEDS OF INIQUITY OVERWHELM
US, THE LORD FORGIVES OUR TRANSGRESSIONS (Psalm 65:3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE
FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD VISITS THE EARTH AND WATERS IT, HE
GREATLY ENRICHES IT; THE RIVER OF GOD IS FULL OF WATER; HE PROVIDES THE
PEOPLE WITH GRAIN, FOR SO HE HAS PREPARED IT (Psalm 65:9). LET US BRING
GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 66, 67

CALL TO WORSHIP: MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO GOD, ALL THE EARTH;
SING THE GLORY OF HIS NAME; GIVE TO HIM GLORIOUS PRAISE (Psalm 66:1-2). LET
US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IF WE CHERISH INIQUITY IN OUR HEARTS, THE LORD
WILL NOT LISTEN. BUT TRULY GOD DOES LISTEN; HE GIVES HEED TO THE WORDS
OF OUR PRAYER (Psalm 66:18-19). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO
GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BLESSED BE GOD, BECAUSE HE HAS NOT
REJECTED OUR PRAYER OR REMOVED HIS STEADFAST LOVE FROM US (Psalm
66:20). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.
AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE EARTH HAS YIELDED ITS INCREASE; GOD, OUR
GOD, HAS BLESSED US. MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS US; LET ALL THE ENDS OF
THE EARTH REVERE HIM (Psalm 67:6-7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF
CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 68

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE SOLEMN PROCESSIONS OF THE LORD ARE SEEN, THE PROCESSIONS OF OUR GOD, OUR KING, INTO THE SANCTUARY: "BLESS GOD IN THE GREAT CONGREGATION, THE LORD, O YOU WHO ARE OF ISRAEL'S FOUNTAIN!" (Psalm 68:24-26). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD ASCENDED THE HIGH MOUNT, LEADING CAPTIVES IN HIS TRAIN AND RECEIVING GIFTS FROM PEOPLE, EVEN FROM THOSE WHO REBEL AGAINST THE LORD GOD'S ABIDING THERE (Psalm 68:18). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BLESSED BE THE LORD, WHO DAILY BEARS US UP; GOD IS OUR SALVATION. OUR GOD IS A GOD OF SALVATION, AND TO GOD, THE LORD, BELONGS ESCAPE FROM DEATH (Psalm 68:19-20). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: RAIN IN ABUNDANCE, THE LORD SHOWERED ABROAD; HE RESTORED HIS HERITAGE WHEN IT LANGUISHED; HIS FLOCK FOUND A DWELLING IN IT; IN HIS GOODNESS THE LORD PROVIDED FOR THE NEEDY (Psalm 68:9-10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 69:1-15

CALL TO WORSHIP: AS FOR US, OUR PRAYER IS TO THE LORD. AT AN ACCEPTABLE TIME, GOD, IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE, WILL ANSWER US (Ps. 69:13). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD WILL NOT LET THE FLOOD SWEEP OVER US, OR THE DEEP SWALLOW US UP, OR THE PIT CLOSE ITS MOUTH OVER US (Psalm 69:15). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WITH GOD'S FAITHFUL HELP WE ARE RESCUED FROM SINKING IN THE MIRE; THE LORD DELIVERS US FROM OUR ENEMIES AND FROM THE DEEP WATERS (Psalm 69:13d-14). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: IT IS ZEAL FOR THE LORD'S HOUSE THAT MAY CONSUME US. EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE MAY SNEAR AT OUR GENEROUS CALL FOR OFFERINGS, WE WILL CONTINUE TO HUMBLE OURSELVES IN SACRIFICIAL GIVING (Psalm 69:9-11). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 69:16-36

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET HEAVEN AND EARTH PRAISE THE LORD, THE SEAS AND EVERYTHING THAT MOVES IN THEM (Psalm 69:34). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD HEARS THE NEEDY, AND DOES NOT DESPISE HIS OWN THAT ARE IN BONDS (Psalm 69:33). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD ANSWERS US, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE IS GOOD. ACCORDING TO HIS ABUNDANT MERCY, HE TURNS TO US (Psalm 69:16). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE WILL PRAISE THE NAME OF GOD WITH A SONG; WE WILL MAGNIFY HIM WITH THANKSGIVINGS (Psalm 69:30). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 70

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET THOSE WHO LOVE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD SAY ALWAYS, "GOD IS GREAT!" (Psalm 70:4b). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: SINCE WE ARE POOR AND NEEDY, THE LORD WILL HASTEN TO US (Psalm 70:5a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD IS OUR HELP AND OUR DELIVERER. THE LORD WILL NOT DELAY (Psalm 70:5b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: LET ALL WHO SEEK GOD REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN THE LORD (Psalm 70:4). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 71

CALL TO WORSHIP: OUR LIPS WILL SHOUT FOR JOY WHEN WE SING
PRAISE TO GOD; OUR SOUL ALSO WHICH HE HAS RESCUED (Psalm 71:23).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL DELIVER US
AND RESCUE US; HE WILL INCLINE HIS EAR TO US AND SAVE US
(Psalm 71:2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS A ROCK OF REFUGE TO US,
A STRONG FORTRESS TO SAVE US, FOR HE IS OUR ROCK AND OUR FORTRESS
(Psalm 71:3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.
AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE WILL COME PRAISING THE MIGHTY DEEDS OF
THE LORD GOD, WE WILL PRAISE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, HIS ALONE (Psalm 71:16).
LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 72

CALL TO WORSHIP: BLESSED BE THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, WHO ALONE DOES WONDROUS THINGS. BLESSED BE HIS GLORIOUS NAME FOREVER; MAY HIS GLORY FILL THE WHOLE EARTH (Ps. 72:18-19). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE GOOD KING DELIVERS THE NEEDY WHEN THEY CALL, THE POOR AND THOSE WHO HAVE NO HELPER (Ps. 72:12). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE GOOD KING HAS PITY ON THE WEAK AND THE NEEDY, AND SAVES THE LIVES OF THE NEEDY (Ps. 72:13). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: MAY THE MOUNTAINS YIELD PROSPERITY FOR THE PEOPLE, AND THE HILLS, IN RIGHTEOUSNESS (Ps. 72:3). [or use Verse 10] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 73

CALL TO WORSHIP: WHEN WE TRY TO UNDERSTAND THINGS WITH OUR OWN MINDS, IT SEEMS TO US A WEARISOME TASK, UNTIL WE GO INTO THE SANCTUARY OF GOD (Psalm 73:16, 17). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: BUT AS FOR US, OUR FEET HAD ALMOST STUMBLLED; OUR STEPS HAD NEARLY SLIPPED (Psalm 73:2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHOM HAVE WE IN HEAVEN BUT GOD? AND THERE IS NOTHING ON EARTH THAT WE DESIRE OTHER THAN THE LORD (Psalm 73:25). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: BUT FOR US IT IS GOOD TO BE NEAR GOD; WE HAVE MADE THE LORD GOD OUR REFUGE, TO TELL OF ALL HIS WORKS (Psalm 73:28). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 74

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE DAY IS THE LORD'S AND SO IS THE NIGHT. OUR GOD HAS ESTABLISHED THE MOON AND THE SUN. HE HAS FIXED ALL THE BOUNDS OF THE EARTH; THE LORD MADE SUMMER AND WINTER. (Ps. 74:16-17)
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD REMEMBERS HIS PEOPLE WHICH HE ACQUIRED LONG AGO, WHICH HE REDEEMED TO BE THE TRIBE OF HIS HERITAGE (Ps. 74:2ab).
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD OUR KING IS FROM OF OLD,
WORKING SALVATION IN THE EARTH (Ps. 74:12). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN
AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD WILL NOT LET THE DOWNTRODDEN BE
PUT TO SHAME; THE POOR AND NEEDY WILL PRAISE GOD'S NAME (Ps. 74:21). LET
US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 75, 76

CALL TO WORSHIP: GOD IS GLORIOUS, MORE MAJESTIC THAN THE EVERLASTING MOUNTAINS (Psalm 76:4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD SAYS TO THE BOASTFUL, "DO NOT BOAST," AND TO THE WICKED, "DO NOT LIFT UP YOUR HORN; DO NOT LIFT' UP YOUR HORN ON HIGH, OR SPEAK WITH INSOLENT NECK" (Psalm 75:4-5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FOR NOT FROM THE EAST OR FROM THE WEST AND NOT FROM THE WILDERNESS COMES LIFTING UP; BUT IT IS GOD WHO EXECUTES JUDGMENT, PUTTING DOWN ONE AND LIFTING UP ANOTHER (Psalm 75:6-7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: MAKE VOWS TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND PERFORM THEM; LET ALL WHO ARE AROUND HIM BRING GIFTS TO THE ONE WHO IS AWESOME, WHO CUTS OFF THE SPIRIT OF PRINCES, WHO INSPIRES FEAR IN THE KINGS OF THE EARTH (Psalm 76:11-12). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 77

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE WILL CALL TO MIND THE DEEDS OF THE LORD;
WE WILL REMEMBER GOD'S WONDERS OF OLD. WE WILL MEDITATE ON THE
LORD'S WORK AND MUSE ON GOD'S MIGHTY DEEDS (Psalm 77:11-12).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL NOT SPURN FOREVER AND NEVER
BE FAVORABLE. HIS STEADFAST LOVE HAS NOT CEASED FOREVER AND HIS
PROMISES ARE NOT AT AN END FOR ALL TIME (Psalm 77:7-8). LET US CONFESS
OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN TO BE
GRACIOUS. HE HAS NOT SHUT UP HIS COMPASSION IN ANGER (Psalm 77:9). GOOD
NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: OUR GOD IS THE ONE WHO WORKS WONDERS; HE
HAS DISPLAYED HIS MIGHTY AMONG THE PEOPLE. WITH HIS STRONG ARM THE
LORD HAS REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE, THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB AND JOSEPH
(Psalm 77:13b-15). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 78:1-20

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD DIVIDED THE SEA AND LET THEM PASS THROUGH IT, AND MADE THE WATERS STAND LIKE A HEAP (Psalm 78:13). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IN THE DAY TIME THE LORD LED THEM WITH A CLOUD, AND ALL NIGHT LONG WITH A FIERY LIGHT (Psalm 78:14). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD SPLIT THE ROCKS OPEN IN THE WILDERNESS, AND GAVE THEM DRINK ABUNDANTLY AS FROM THE DEEP (Psalm 78:15). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD MADE STREAMS COME OUT OF THE ROCK, AND CAUSED WATERS TO FLOW DOWN LIKE RIVERS (Psalm 78:16). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 78:21-38

CALL TO WORSHIP: THEY REMEMBERED THAT GOD WAS THEIR ROCK,
THE MOST HIGH GOD THEIR REDEEMER (Psalm 78:35). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: YET HE, BEING COMPASSIONATE, FORGAVE THEIR
INIQUITY, AND DID NOT DESTROY THEM (Psalm 78:38a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN
AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: OFTEN HE RESTRAINED HIS ANGER, AND
DID NOT STIR UP ALL HIS WRATH (Psalm 78:38b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN
AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: YET HE COMMANDED THE SKIES ABOVE, AND
OPENED THE DOORS OF HEAVEN; HE RAINED DOWN ON THEM MANNA TO EAT,
AND GAVE THEM THE GRAIN OF HEAVEN (Psalm 78:23, 24). LET US BRING GIFTS
FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 78:39-55

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD DROVE OUT NATIONS BEFORE THEM; HE APPORTIONED THEM FOR A POSSESSION AND SETTLED THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL IN THEIR TENTS (Psalm 78:55). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD LED OUT HIS PEOPLE LIKE SHEEP, AND GUIDED THEM IN THE WILDERNESS LIKE A FLOCK (Psalm 78:52). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HE LED THEM IN SAFETY, SO THAT THEY WERE NOT AFRAID; BUT THE SEA OVERWHELMED THEIR ENEMIES (Psalm 78:53). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD BROUGHT THEM TO HIS HOLY HILL, TO THE MOUNTAIN THAT HIS RIGHT HAND HAD WON (Psalm 78:54). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 78:56-72

CALL TO WORSHIP: THEY PROVOKED HIM TO ANGER WITH THEIR HIGH PLACES; THEY MOVED HIM TO JEALOUSY WITH THEIR IDOLS (Psalm 78:58). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THEY TESTED THE MOST HIGH GOD, AND REBELLED AGAINST HIM. THEY DID NOT OBSERVE HIS DECREES, BUT TURNED AWAY AND WERE FAITHLESS LIKE THEIR ANCESTORS; THEY TWISTED LIKE A TREACHEROUS BOW (Psalm 78:56-57). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD AWOKE AS FROM SLEEP, LIKE A WARRIOR SHOUTING BECAUSE OF WINE. HE PUT HIS ADVERSARIES (OUR SIN AND GUILT) TO ROUT; HE PUT THEM TO EVERLASTING DISGRACE (Ps. 78:65-66). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD CHOSE HIS SERVANT DAVID TO BE THE SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL. WITH UPRIGHT HEART HE TENDED THEM, AND GUIDED THEM WITH SKILLFUL HAND (Ps. 78:70-72). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 79

CALL TO WORSHIP: THEN WE YOUR PEOPLE, THE FLOCK OF YOUR PASTURE, WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOU FOREVER... (Psalm 79:13a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: DO NOT REMEMBER AGAINST US THE INIQUITIES OF OUR ANCESTORS; LET YOUR COMPASSION COME SPEEDILY TO MEET US, FOR WE ARE BROUGHT VERY LOW (Psalm 79:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HELP US, O GOD OF OUR SALVATION, FOR THE GLORY OF YOUR NAME; DELIVER US, AND FORGIVE OUR SINS, FOR YOUR NAME'S SAKE (Psalm 79:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION WE WILL RECOUNT THE LORD'S PRAISE (Psalm 79:13b). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 80

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL LEADS JOSEPH LIKE A FLOCK! THE LORD IS ENTHRONED UPON THE CHERUBIM (Psalm 80:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS HAS INDEED LET HIS FACE SHINE IN JESUS CHRIST, SO THAT WE MIGHT BE SAVED (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS HAS TURNED AGAIN AND LOOKED DOWN FROM HEAVEN IN MERCY. HE HAS SEEN AND HAD REGARD FOR THIS VINE, THE STOCK THAT HIS RIGHT HAND PLANTED (Psalm 80:14-15). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD BROUGHT A VINE OUT OF EGYPT; HE DROVE OUT THE NATIONS AND PLANTED IT. HE CLEARED THE GROUND FOR IT; IT TOOK DEEP ROOT AND FILLED THE LAND (Psalm 80:8-9). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 81

CALL TO WORSHIP: SING ALOUD TO GOD OUR STRENGTH; SHOUT FOR JOY TO THE GOD OF JACOB. RAISE A SONG, SOUND THE TAMBOURINE, THE SWEET LYRE WITH THE HARP (Psalm 81:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD OUR GOD HAS BROUGHT ISRAEL UP OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT. IF WE OPEN OUR MOUTHS WIDE IN CALL TO CONFESSION, HE WILL RESCUE US (Psalm 81:10). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS TURNED HIS HAND AGAINST OUR FOE, THE EVIL ONE. THE LORD HAS QUICKLY SUBDUED OUR ENEMY, THE SIN THAT IS IN US (Psalm 81:14). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS FED US WITH THE FINEST WHEAT, AND WITH HONEY FROM THE ROCK HE HAS SATISFIED US (Psalm 81:16). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 82

CALL TO WORSHIP: GOD HAS TAKEN HIS PLACE IN THE DIVINE COUNCIL;
IN THE MIDST OF THE GODS HE HOLDS JUDGMENT (Psalm 82:1). LET US WORSHIP
GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD WILL RISE UP AND JUDGE THE EARTH, FOR ALL
THE NATIONS BELONG TO HIM (Psalm 82:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND
BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD RESCUES THE WEAK AND THE
NEEDY; DELIVERS THEM FROM THE HAND OF THE WICKED (Psalm 82:4). GOOD
NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: GOD GIVES JUSTICE TO THE WEAK AND THE
ORPHAN; MAINTAINS THE RIGHT OF THE LOWLY AND DESTITUTE (Psalm 82:3).
LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 83

CALL TO WORSHIP: GOD ALONE, WHOSE NAME IS THE LORD, IS THE MOST HIGH OVER ALL THE EARTH (Psalm 83:18). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL NOT FILL OUR FACES WITH SHAME. THEREFORE WE MAY SEEK HIS NAME EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE BEEN HIS ENEMIES (Psalm 83:16). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL NOT LET US BE PUT TO SHAME AND DISMAYED FOREVER; HE WILL NOT LET US PERISH IN DISGRACE (Psalm 83:17). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD GOD HAS GIVEN US EVERY PLANT YIELDING SEED THAT IS UPON THE FACE OF ALL THE EARTH...TO HAVE FOR FOOD. BUT WE ARE NOT TO TAKE THE PASTURES OF GOD FOR OUR OWN POSSESSION (Genesis 1:29; Psalm 83:12). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 84

CALL TO WORSHIP: HAPPY ARE THOSE WHOSE STRENGTH IS IN THE LORD, IN WHOSE HEART ARE THE HIGHWAYS TO ZION (Psalm 84:5). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: LOOK AT OUR SHIELD, O GOD; YOU WILL SEE THE FACE OF JESUS, YOUR ANOINTED ONE (Psalm 84:9).LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FOR THE LORD GOD IS A SUN AND SHIELD; HE BESTOWS FAVOR AND HONOR (Psalm 84:11a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FOR A DAY IN YOUR COURTS IS BETTER THAN A THOUSAND ELSEWHERE. I WOULD RATHER BE A DOORKEEPER IN THE HOUSE OF MY GOD THAN LIVE IN THE 'TENTS OF WICKEDNESS (Psalm 84:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST’S CHURCH.

Psalm 85

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS SHOWN US HIS STEADFAST LOVE
AND GRANTED US HIS SALVATION (Psalm 85:7). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GOD THE LORD WILL SPEAK PEACE TO HIS PEOPLE,
TO HIS FAITHFUL, TO THOSE WHO TURN TO HIM IN THEIR HEARTS (Psalm 85:8).
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS FORGIVEN THE INIQUITY
OF HIS PEOPLE; HE HAS PARDONED ALL THEIR SIN. THE LORD WITHDREW ALL
HIS WRATH; HE TURNED FROM HIS HOT ANGER (Psalm 85:2-3). GOOD NEWS! WE
ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD GIVES WHAT IS GOOD, AND OUR LAND
YIELDS ITS INCREASE (Psalm 85:12). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF
CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 86

CALL TO WORSHIP: ALL THE NATIONS WHICH GOD HAS MADE SHALL COME AND BOW DOWN BEFORE THE LORD, AND SHALL GLORIFY GOD'S NAME. FOR THE LORD IS GREAT AND DOES WONDROUS THINGS; THE LORD ALONE IS GOD (Psalm 86:9-10). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS GOOD AND FORGIVING, ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE TO ALL WHO CALL ON HIM (Psalm 86:5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS A GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS (Psalm 86:15). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE GIVE THANKS TO YOU, O LORD OUR GOD, WITH OUR WHOLE HEART, AND WE WILL GLORIFY YOUR NAME FOREVER. FOR GREAT IS YOUR STADFAST LOVE TOWARD US; YOU HAVE DELIVERED OUR SOUL FROM THE DEPTHS OF SHEOL (Psalm 86:12-13). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 87

CALL TO WORSHIP: SINGERS AND DANCERS ALIKE SAY, "ALL MY SPRINGS ARE IN YOU" (Psalm 87:7). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WELCOMES US BACK AS LOST CHILDREN, TO DWELL SAFELY IN HIS HOLY CITY (Psalm 87:5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WRITES OUR NAMES DOWN AS WE RETURN TO HIM, ANNOUNCING THAT WE ARE NATIVES OF HIS HOME TOWN (Psalm 87:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FOREIGN NATIONS ACKNOWLEDGE THE POWER OF THE GOD OF ISRAEL, SUCH AS RAHAB AND BABYLON; PHILISTIA TOO, AND TYRE, WITH ETHIOPIA (Psalm 87:4). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 88

CALL TO WORSHIP: EVERYDAY WE ARE TO CALL ON THE LORD AND SPREAD OUT OUR HANDS TO HIM. CRY OUT TO THE LORD IN THE MORNING AND LET OUR PRAYERS COME BEFORE HIM (Psalm 88:9b, 13). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD IS DECLARED ALL ALONG THIS DYING WAY, EVEN INTO THE GRAVE AND BEYOND (Psalm 88:11a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WORKS WONDERS EVEN FOR THOSE WHO ARE PRACTICALLY DEAD IN THEIR SEPARATION FROM GOD (Psalm 88:10a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD LETS OUR PRAYERS COME BEFORE HIM; HE INCLINES HIS EAR TO OUR CRY IN THE NIGHT (Psalm 88:1b-2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 89:1-29

CALL TO WORSHIP: I WILL SING OF YOUR STEADFAST LOVE, O LORD, FOREVER; WITH MY MOUTH I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR FAITHFULNESS TO ALL GENERATIONS. I DECLARE THAT YOUR STEADFAST LOVE IS ESTABLISHED FOREVER; YOUR FAITHFULNESS IS AS FIRM AS THE HEAVENS (Psalm 89:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE ARE THE FOUNDATION OF THE LORD'S THRONE (Psalm 89:14a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS GO BEFORE THE LORD (Psalm 89:14b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD IS THE GLORY OF OUR STRENGTH; BY HIS FAVOR OUR HORN IS EXALTED (Psalm 89:17). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 89:30-52

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS ESTABLISHED HIS KINGDOM FOREVER, LIKE THE MOON, AN ENDURING WITNESS IN THE SKIES. BLESSED BE THE LORD FOREVER AND EVER (Psalm 89:37, 52). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL NOT REMOVE HIS STEADFAST LOVE FROM HIS PEOPLE OR BE FALSE TO HIS FAITHFULNESS (Psalm 89:33). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL NOT VIOLATE HIS COVENANT, OR ALTER THE WORD THAT WENT FORTH FROM HIS LIPS (Psalm 89:34). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS SWORN BY HIS HOLINESS THAT THE THRONE OF HIS CHRIST IN THE LINE OF DAVID WILL CONTINUE FOREVER (Psalm 89:35-36). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 90

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS BEEN OUR DWELLING PLACE IN ALL GENERATIONS. BEFORE THE MOUNTAINS WERE BROUGHT FORTH, OR EVER GOD HAD FORMED THE EARTH AND THE WORLD, FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING THE LORD IS GOD (Psalm 90:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD HAS CALLED UP OUR INIQUITIES ON THE HEAVENLY VIEWING SCREEN, OUR SECRET SINS ARE BROUGHT TO LIGHT BY GOD'S FACE (Psalm 90:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GOD WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD! THE LORD WILL SATISFY US IN THE MORNING WITH THE STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD, SO THAT WE MAY REJOICE AND BE GLAD ALL OUR DAYS (Psalm 90:13-14). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: LET THE FAVOR OF THE LORD OUR GOD BE UPON US, AND PROSPER FOR US THE WORK OF OUR HANDS--- O PROSPER THE WORK OF OUR HANDS! (Psalm 90:17). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 91

CALL TO WORSHIP: YOU WHO LIVE IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH, WHO ABIDE IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY, WILL SAY TO THE LORD, "MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS; MY GOD, IN WHOM I TRUST" (Ps. 91:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: FOR HE WILL DELIVER YOU FROM THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER AND FROM THE DEADLY PESTILENCE (Ps. 91:3). [Or use Ps. 91:14.] LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HE WILL COVER YOU WITH HIS PINIONS, AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU WILL FIND REFUGE (Ps. 91:4). [Or use Ps. 91-16.] GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FOR HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU IN ALL YOUR WAYS. ON THEIR HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT DASH YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE (Ps. 91:11-12). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 92

CALL TO WORSHIP: IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, TO SING PRAISES TO THE NAME OF THE MOST HIGH (Psalm 92:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: HOW GREAT ARE THE WORKS OF THE LORD! HIS THOUGHTS ARE VERY DEEP (Psalm 92:5)! LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS UPRIGHT; HE IS OUR ROCK, AND THERE IS NO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN HIM (Psalm 92:15). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

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CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS LIFTED UP A HORN FULL OF OIL FOR OUR ANOINTING, A HORN LIKE THAT OF THE WILD OX; THE LORD HAS POURED OVER US FRESH OIL FOR OUR COMFORT (Psalm 92:10). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 93

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS KING, HE IS ROBED IN MAJESTY; THE LORD IS ROBED, HE IS GIRDED WITH STRENGTH (Psalm 93:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD'S DECREES ARE VERY SURE; HOLINESS BEFITS THE LORD'S HOUSE FOREVERMORE (Psalm 93:5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS MORE MAJESTIC THAN THE THUNDERS OF MIGHTY WATERS, MORE MAJESTIC THAN THE WAVES OF THE SEA, MAJESTIC ON HIGH IS THE LORD (Psalm 93:4)! GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS ESTABLISHED THE WORLD; IT SHALL NEVER BE MOVED; THE LORD'S THRONE IS ESTABLISHED FROM OF OLD; THE LORD IS FROM EVERLASTING (Psalm 93:1b-2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 94

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS BECOME OUR STRONGHOLD, AND OUR GOD THE ROCK OF OUR REFUGE (Psalm 94:22). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IF THE LORD HAD NOT BEEN MY HELP, MY SOUL WOULD SOON HAVE LIVED IN THE LAND OF SILENCE. (Psalm 94:17)
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN I THOUGHT "MY FOOT IS SLIPPING," YOUR STEADFAST LOVE, O LORD, HELD ME UP (Psalm 94:18). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD WILL NOT FORSAKE HIS PEOPLE; HE WILL NOT ABANDON HIS HERITAGE; FOR JUSTICE WILL RETURN TO THE RIGHTEOUS, AND ALL THE UPRIGHT IN HEART WILL FOLLOW IT (Psalm 94:14-15). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 95, 96

CALL TO WORSHIP: O COME, LET US SING TO THE LORD; LET US MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE ROCK OF OUR SALVATION! LET US COME INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH THANKSGIVING; LET US MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO HIM WITH SONGS OF PRAISE (Ps. 95:1-2)! [Or use Ps. 95:6, 7 or Ps. 96:1-4 or Ps. 96:4.] LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: GREAT IS THE LORD, AND GREATLY TO BE PRAISED; HE IS TO BE REVERED ABOVE ALL GODS. (Ps. 96:4) (or use Ps. 96:5)
LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS A GREAT GOD, AND A GREAT KING ABOVE ALL GODS (Ps. 95:3). [Or use Ps. 96:6] GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: ASCRIBE TO THE LORD, O FAMILIES OF THE PEOPLES, ASCRIBE TO THE LORD GLORY AND STRENGTH. ASCRIBE TO THE LORD THE GLORY DUE HIS NAME; BRING AN OFFERING, AND COME INTO HIS COURTS. CALL TO WORSHIP THE LORD IN HOLY SPLENDOR; TREMBLE BEFORE HIM, ALL THE EARTH (Ps. 96:7-9). [Or use Ps. 96:8] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 97

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS KING! LET THE EARTH REJOICE; LET THE MANY COASTLANDS BE GLAD (Psalm 97:1)! LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD LOVES THOSE WHO HATE EVIL (Psalm 97:10a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD GUARDS THE LIVES OF HIS FAITHFUL; HE RESCUES THEM FROM THE HAND OF THE WICKED (Psalm 97:10 b, e). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: ZION HEARS AND IS GLAD, AND THE TOWNS OF JUDAH REJOICE, BECAUSE OF YOUR JUDGMENTS, O GOD (Psalm 97:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 98

CALL TO WORSHIP: O SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG, FOR HE HAS DONE MARVELOUS THINGS, HIS RIGHT HAND AND HIS HOLY ARM HAVE GOTTEN HIM VICTORY (Psalm 98:1). [Or use Psalm 98:4] LET US WORSHIP GOD!

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD HAS MADE KNOWN HIS VICTORY; HE HAS REVEALED HIS VINDICATION IN THE SIGHT OF THE NATIONS (Ps. 98:2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS REMEMBERED HIS STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH HAVE SEEN THE VICTORY OF OUR GOD (Ps. 98:3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST.
AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: LET THE SEA ROAR, AND ALL THAT FILLS IT; THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN IT. LET THE FLOODS CLAP THEIR HANDS; LET THE HILLS SING TOGETHER FOR JOY AT THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD, FOR HE IS COMING TO JUDGE THE EARTH. HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THE PEOPLE WITH EQUITY (Ps. 98:7-9). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 99

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS GREAT IN ZION; HE IS EXALTED OVER ALL THE PEOPLES. LET THEM PRAISE HIS GREAT AND AWESOME NAME (Psalm 99:2-3a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: MOSES AND AARON WERE AMONG HIS PRIESTS, SAMUEL ALSO WAS AMONG THOSE WHO CALLED ON HIS NAME. THEY CRIED TO THE LORD, AND HE ANSWERED THEM (Psalm 99:6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD OUR GOD ANSWERED THEM; HE WAS A FORGIVING GOD TO THEM, BUT AN AVENGER OF THEIR WRONGDOINGS (Psalm 99:8). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD, A MIGHTY KING, A LOVER OF JUSTICE, HAS ESTABLISHED EQUITY; HE HAS EXECUTED JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN JACOB (Psalm 99:4). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 100

CALL TO WORSHIP: MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE LORD, ALL THE EARTH. CALL TO WORSHIP THE LORD WITH GLADNESS; COME INTO HIS PRESENCE WITH SINGING (Ps. 100:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD. IT IS HE THAT MADE US, AND WE ARE HIS; WE ARE HIS PEOPLE, AND THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE (Ps. 100:3). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FOR THE LORD IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER, AND HIS FAITHFULNESS TO ALL GENERATIONS (Ps. 100:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: ENTER HIS GATES WITH THANKSGIVING, AND HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE. GIVE THANKS TO HIM, BLESS HIS NAME (Ps. 100:4). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 101

CALL TO WORSHIP: I WILL SING OF LOYALTY AND OF JUSTICE; TO YOU, O LORD, I WILL SING (Psalm 101:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: I WILL STUDY THE WAY THAT IS BLAMELESS. WHEN SHALL I ATTAIN IT (Psalm 101:2a)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: I WILL WALK WITH INTEGRITY OF HEART WITHIN MY HOUSE; I WILL NOT SET BEFORE MY EYES ANYTHING THAT IS BASE (Psalm 101:2b-3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: I HATE THE WORK OF THOSE WHO FALL AWAY; IT SHALL NOT CLING TO ME (Psalm 101:3b). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 102

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS ENTHRONED FOREVER; HIS NAME
ENDURES TO ALL GENERATIONS (Psalm 102:12). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL REGARD THE PRAYER OF THE
DESTITUTE, AND WILL NOT DESPISE THEIR PRAYER (Psalm 102:17). LET US
CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL RISE UP AND HAVE
COMPASSION ON HIS PEOPLE, FOR IT IS TIME TO FAVOR THEM; THE APPOINTED
TIME HAS COME (Psalm 102:13). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE
WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE CHILDREN OF THE LORD'S SERVANTS SHALL
LIVE SECURE; THEIR OFFSPRING SHALL BE ESTABLISHED IN THE LORD'S
PRESENCE (Psalm 102:28). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S
CHURCH.

Psalm 103

CALL TO WORSHIP: BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND ALL THAT IS WITHIN ME, BLESS HIS HOLY NAME. BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND DO NOT FORGET ALL HIS BENEFITS (Psalm 103:1-2). [Or use Ps. 103:1] LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 103:8). [Or use Ps. 108:8-9 or Ps. 103:13] LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HE WILL NOT ALWAYS ACCUSE, NOR WILL HE KEEP HIS ANGER FOREVER (Psalm 103:9). [Or use Ps. 103:10-12 or 10 or 14] GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND DO NOT FORGET ALL HIS BENEFITS (Psalm 103:2). [Or use Ps. 103:2a, 5a, or 20] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 104:1-23

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD OUR GOD IS VERY GREAT. HE IS CLOTHED WITH HONOR AND MAJESTY, WRAPPED IN LIGHT AS WITH A GARMENT (Psalm 104:1b-2a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD COVERED THE EARTH WITH THE DEEP AS WITH A GARMENT; THE WATERS STOOD ABOVE THE MOUNTAINS (Psalm 104:6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD SET A BOUNDARY FOR THE WATERS THAT THEY MIGHT NOT PASS, SO THAT THEY MIGHT NOT AGAIN COVER THE EARTH (Psalm 104:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD CAUSES THE GRASS TO GROW FOR THE CATTLE, AND PLANTS FOR PEOPLE TO USE, TO BRING FORTH FOOD FROM THE EARTH, AND WINE TO GLADDEN THE HUMAN HEART, OIL TO MAKE THE FACE SHINE, AND BREAD TO STRENGTHEN THE HUMAN HEART (Psalm 104:14-15). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 104:24-35

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE WILL SING TO THE LORD AS LONG AS WE LIVE; WE WILL SING PRAISE TO OUR GOD WHILE WE HAVE BEING (Psalm 104:3).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WHEN THE CREATOR HIDES HIS FACE, THE CREATURES ARE DISMAYED; WHEN THE CREATOR TAKES AWAY THEIR BREATH, THEY DIE AND RETURN TO THEIR DUST (Psalm 104:29). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN THE LORD SENDS FORTH HIS SPIRIT, THE LIVING THINGS ARE CREATED; AND THE FACE OF THE GROUND IS RENEWED (Psalm 104: 30). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LIVING THINGS ALL LOOK TO THE LORD TO GIVE THEM THEIR FOOD IN DUE SEASON; WHEN THE LORD GIVES TO THEM, THEY GATHER IT UP; WHEN HE OPENS HIS HAND, THEY ARE FILLED WITH GOOD THINGS (Psalm 104:27-28). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 105:1-25

CALL TO WORSHIP: O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, CALL ON HIS NAME, MAKE KNOWN HIS DEEDS AMONG THE PEOPLES (Ps. 105:1) [or use vv. 1-3]. LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS MINDFUL OF HIS COVENANT FOREVER, OF THE WORD THAT HE COMMANDED, FOR A THOUSAND GENERATIONS, THE COVENANT THAT HE MADE WITH ABRAHAM, HIS SWORN PROMISE TO ISAAC, WHICH HE CONFIRMED TO JACOB AS A STATUTE, TO ISRAEL AS AN EVERLASTING COVENANT (Psalm 105:8-10). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN THEY WERE FEW IN NUMBER, OF LITTLE ACCOUNT, AND STRANGERS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, ...HE ALLOWED NO ONE TO OPPRESS THEM; HE REBUKED KINGS ON THEIR ACCOUNT, SAYING, "DO NOT TOUCH MY ANOINTED ONES; DO MY PROPHETS NO HARM" (Psalm 105:12-15). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: REMEMBER THE WONDERFUL WORKS THE LORD HAS DONE, HIS MIRACLES, AND THE JUDGMENTS HE UTTERED (Psalm 105:5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 105:26-45

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD BROUGHT HIS PEOPLE OUT WITH JOY, HIS CHOSEN ONES WITH SINGING... PRAISE THE LORD (Psalm 105:43, 45b)! LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD GAVE TO HIS PEOPLE THE LAND OF PROMISE, THAT THEY MIGHT KEEP HIS STATUTES AND OBSERVE HIS LAWS (Psalm 105:44-45a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD SENT HIS SERVANT MOSES, AND ARRON WHOM HE HAD CHOSEN... THEN HE BROUGHT ISRAEL OUT, AND THERE WAS NO ONE AMONG THEIR TRIBES WHO STUMBLED (Psalm 105:26, 37). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE PEOPLE ASKED AND THE LORD BROUGHT QUAILS, AND GAVE THEM FOOD FROM HEAVEN IN ABUNDANCE. HE OPENED THE ROCK, AND WATER GUSHED OUT; IT FLOWED THROUGH THE DESERT LIKE A RIVER (Psalm 105:40-41). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 106:1-27

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD,
FOR HE IS GOOD; FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Psalm 106:1). LET
US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: BOTH WE AND OUR ANCESTORS HAVE SINNED; WE
HAVE COMMITTED INIQUITY, HAVE DONE WICKEDLY (Psalm 106:6). LET US
CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: YET HE SAVED THEM FOR HIS NAME'S
SAKE, SO THAT HE MIGHT MAKE KNOWN HIS MIGHTY POWER (Psalm 106:8). GOOD
NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: HE REBUKED THE RED SEA, AND IT BECAME DRY; HE
LED THEM THROUGH THE DEEP AS THROUGH A DESERT (Psalm 106:9). LET US
BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 106:28-48

CALL TO WORSHIP: BLESSED BE THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING. AND LET ALL THE PEOPLE ... PRAISE THE LORD (Psalm 106:48)! LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: MANY TIMES THE LORD DELIVERED THEM, BUT THEY WERE REBELLIOUS IN THEIR PURPOSES, AND WERE BROUGHT LOW THROUGH THEIR INIQUITY (Psalm 106 43). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FOR THEIR SAKE THE LORD REMEMBERED HIS COVENANT, AND SHOWED COMPASSION ACCORDING TO THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 106:45). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS SAVED US AND HAS GATHERED US FROM AMONG THE PEOPLES, THAT WE MAY GIVE THANKS TO HIS HOLY NAME AND GLORY IN HIS PRAISE (Psalm 106:47). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 107:1-22

CALL TO WORSHIP: O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Psalm 107:1) (or: use Ps. 107:1-3). LET US WORSHIP GOD

CALL TO CONFESSION: SOME SAT IN DARKNESS AND IN GLOOM, PRISONERS IN MISERY AND IN IRONS, FOR THEY HAD REBELLED AGAINST THE WORDS OF GOD, AND SPURNED THE COUNSEL OF THE MOST HIGH. THEIR HEARTS WERE BOWED DOWN WITH HARD LABOR; THEY FELL DOWN, WITH NO ONE TO HELP (Psalm 107:10-12) [or use Ps. 107:19]. LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THEN THEY CRIED TO THE LORD IN THEIR TROUBLE, AND HE SAVED THEM FROM THEIR DISTRESS (Ps. 107:13) [or vv. 13-14 or v. 20]. GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: LET THEM OFFER THANKSGIVING SACRIFICES AND TELL OF HIS DEEDS WITH SONGS OF JOY (Ps. 107:22) [Or use Ps. 107:21-22]. LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 107:23-43

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET THE PEOPLE THANK THE LORD FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE, FOR HIS WONDERFUL WORKS TO HUMANKIND. LET THEM EXTOL HIM IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE PEOPLE, AND PRAISE HIM IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ELDERS (Psalm 107:31-32). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD TURNS RIVERS INTO A DESERT, SPRINGS OF WATER INTO THIRSTY GROUND, A FRUITFUL LAND INTO A SALTY WASTE, BECAUSE OF THE WICKEDNESS OF ITS INHABITANTS (Psalm 107:33-34). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD TURNS A DESERT INTO POOLS OF WATER, A PARCHED LAND INTO SPRINGS OF WATER. AND THERE HE LETS THE HUNGRY LIVE, AND THEY ESTABLISH A TOWN TO LIVE IN (Psalm 107:35-36). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THEY SOW FIELDS, AND PLANT VINEYARDS, AND GET A FRUITFUL YIELD. BY THE LORD'S BLESSING THEY MULTIPLY GREATLY, AND HE DOES NOT LET THEIR CATTLE DECREASE (Psalm 107:37-38). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 108

CALL TO WORSHIP: BE EXALTED O GOD, ABOVE THE HEAVENS, AND LET YOUR GLORY BE OVER ALL THE EARTH (Psalm 108:5). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD IS HIGHER THAN THE HEAVENS, AND HIS FAITHFULNESS REACHES THE CLOUDS (Psalm 108:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD GIVES VICTORY WITH HIS RIGHT HAND, AND ANSWERS US, SO THAT THOSE WHOM HE LOVES MAY BE RESCUED (Psalm 108:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE WILL GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD AMONG THE PEOPLES, AND WE WILL SING PRAISES TO HIM AMONG THE NATIONS (Psalm 108:3). LET US BRING OUR GIFT'S FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 109

CALL TO WORSHIP: WITH OUR MOUTHS WE WILL GIVE GREAT THANKS TO THE LORD; WE WILL PRAISE HIM IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONG (Psalm 109:30). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE ARE POOR AND NEEDY; OUR HEARTS ARE PIERCED WITHIN US BECAUSE OF THE SIN WHICH ASSAILS US. BUT THE LORD OUR GOD WILL SAVE US AND HELP US ACCORDING TO HIS STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 109:22, 26). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD, OUR LORD, HAS ACTED ON OUR BEHALF FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE; BECAUSE HIS STEADFAST LOVE IS GOOD, HE HAS DELIVERED US (Psalm 109:21). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD STANDS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE NEEDY TO SAVE THEM FROM THOSE WHO WOULD CONDEMN THEM TO DEATH (Psalm 109:31). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 110, 111

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! WE WILL GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD WITH OUR WHOLE HEART, IN THE COMPANY OF THE UPRIGHT, IN THE CONGREGATION (Psalm 111:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE WORKS OF THE LORD'S HANDS ARE FAITHFUL AND JUST; ALL HIS PRECEPTS ARE TRUSTWORTHY (Psalm 111:7). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD SENT REDEMPTION TO HIS PEOPLE; HE HAS COMMANDED HIS COVENANT FOREVER (Psalm 111:9). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD PROVIDES FOOD FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM; HE IS EVER MINDFUL OF HIS COVENANT (Psalm 111:5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 112

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD, WHO GREATLY DELIGHT IN HIS COMMANDMENTS (Psalm 112:1).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE WICKED SEE IT AND ARE ANGRY; THEY GNASH THEIR TEETH AND MELT AWAY; THE DESIRE OF THE WICKED COMES TO NOTHING (Psalm 112:10). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD, WHO GREATLY DELIGHT IN HIS COMMANDMENTS (Psalm 112:1bc).
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THEY HAVE DISTRIBUTED FREELY, THEY HAVE GIVEN TO THE POOR; THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER; THEIR HORN IS EXALTED IN HONOR (Psalm 112:9). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 113, 114

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! PRAISE O SERVANTS OF THE LORD; PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD. BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD FROM THIS TIME ON AND FOREVER MORE (Psalm 113:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: TREMBLE, O EARTH, AT THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD, AT THE PRESENCE OF THE GOD OF JACOB, WHO TURNS THE ROCK INTO A POOL OF WATER, THE FLINT INTO A SPRING OF WATER (Psalm 114:7-8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN ISRAEL WENT OUT FROM EGYPT, THE HOUSE OF JACOB FROM A PEOPLE OF STRANGE LANGUAGE, JUDAH BECAME GOD'S SANCTUARY, ISRAEL HIS DOMINION (Psalm 114:1-2).
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: HE RAISES THE POOR FROM THE DUST, AND LIFTS THE NEEDY FROM THE ASH HEAP, TO MAKE THEM SIT WITH PRINCES, WITH THE PRINCES OF HIS PEOPLE (Psalm 113:7-8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 115

CALL TO WORSHIP: NOT TO US, O LORD, NOT TO US, BUT TO YOUR NAME
GIVE GLORY, FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR STEADFAST LOVE AND YOUR
FAITHFULNESS (Psalm 115:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: YOU WHO FEAR THE LORD, TRUST IN THE LORD! HE
IS YOUR HELP AND YOUR SHIELD (Psalm 115:11). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND
BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS BEEN MINDFUL OF US;
HE WILL BLESS US; HE WILL BLESS THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD, BOTH SMALL
AND GREAT (Psalm 115:12, 13). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE
WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: MAY THE LORD GIVE YOU INCREASE, BOTH YOU
AND YOUR CHILDREN. MAY YOU BE BLESSED BY THE LORD, WHO MADE
HEAVEN AND EARTH (Psalm 115:14-15). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF
CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 116, 117

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD, ALL YOU NATIONS! EXTOL HIM, ALL YOU PEOPLES! FOR GREAT IS HIS STEADFAST LOVE TOWARD US, AND THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER. PRAISE THE LORD (Psalm 117)! LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE SNARES OF DEATH ENCOMPASSED ME; THE PANGS OF SHEOL LAID HOLD ON ME; I SUFFERED DISTRESS AND ANGUISH. THEN I CALLED ON THE NAME OF THE LORD: "O LORD, I PRAY, SAVE MY LIFE " (Psalm 116:3-4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: GRACIOUS IS THE LORD, AND RIGHTEOUS; OUR GOD IS MERCIFUL (Psalm 116:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: I WILL OFFER TO YOU A THANKSGIVING SACRIFICE AND CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD, I WILL PAY MY VOWS TO THE LORD IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL HIS PEOPLE, IN THE COURTS OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, IN YOUR MIDST, O JERUSALEM. PRAISE THE LORD (Psalm 116:17-19)! LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 118

CALL TO WORSHIP: THERE ARE GLAD SONGS OF VICTORY IN THE TENTS OF THE RIGHTEOUS: "THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD DOES VALIANTLY; THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD IS EXALTED; THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD DOES VALIANTLY" (Ps. 118:15, 16). [Or use v. 19, or vv. 22-23, or v. 24 or vv. 22-24.] LET US WORSHIP GOD!

CALL TO CONFESSION: OUT OF MY DISTRESS I CALLED ON THE LORD (Ps. 118:5). [Or use v. 8, or vv. 8-9, or v. 22.] LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: OUT OF MY DISTRESS I CALLED ON THE LORD; THE LORD ANSWERED ME AND SET ME IN A BROAD PLACE. WITH THE LORD ON MY SIDE I DO NOT FEAR. WHAT CAN MORTALS DO TO ME (Psalm 118:5-6)? [Or use v. 5b or v. 6, or vv. 6,7, or v. 8, or vv. 8-9, or v. 23.] GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Ps. 118:1)! [or use v. 27, or v. 118:26-27.] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:1-24

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD WITH AN UPRIGHT HEART; SEEK THE LORD WITH THE WHOLE HEART (Psalm 119:7a, 10a). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD HAS COMMANDED HIS PRECEPTS TO BE KEPT DILIGENTLY (Psalm 119:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS OPENED OUR EYES SO THAT WE MAY BEHOLD WONDROUS THINGS OUT OF HIS LAW (Psalm 119:18). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD HAS DEALT BOUNTIFULLY WITH HIS SERVANTS, SO THAT WE MAY LIVE AND OBSERVE HIS WORD (Psalm 119:17). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:25-48

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD CONFIRMS TO HIS SERVANTS THE PROMISES WHICH ARE FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM (Psalm 119:38). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD GRACIOUSLY TEACHES US HIS LAW; HE MAKES US UNDERSTAND THE WAY OF HIS PRECEPTS (Psalm 119:29b, 27a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD HAS COME TO US, HIS SALVATION ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE (Psalm 119:41). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD GIVES US UNDERSTANDING THAT WE MAY KEEP HIS LAW AND OBSERVE IT WITH OUR WHOLE HEART (Psalm 119:34). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:49-72

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE STATUTES OF THE LORD HAVE BEEN OUR SONG WHEREVER WE HAVE MADE OUR HOME (Psalm 119:54). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD REMEMBERS HIS WORD TO HIS SERVANTS IN WHICH HE HAS MADE US HOPE. THIS IS OUR COMFORT IN OUR DISTRESS, THAT GOD'S PROMISE GIVES US LIFE (Ps. 119:49-50). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE EARTH IS FULL OF THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD. HE HAS DEALT WELL WITH HIS SERVANTS, ACCORDING TO HIS WORD (Ps. 119:64-65). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE BLESSING OF THE LORD FALLS ON US IN REMEMBERING HIS NAME AND KEEPING HIS PRECEPTS. THE LAW OF HIS MOUTH IS BETTER TO US THAN THOUSANDS OF GOLD AND SILVER PIECES (Psalm 119:55, 56, 72). LET US BRING OUR GIFTS TO ALMIGHTY GOD.

Psalm 119:73-88

CALL TO WORSHIP: THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD SHALL SEE US AND REJOICE, BECAUSE WE HAVE HOPED IN HIS WORD (Psalm 119:74). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE KNOW THAT THE LORD'S JUDGMENTS ARE RIGHT, AND THAT IN FAITHFULNESS HE HAS HUMBLLED US (Psalm 119:75). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD'S STEADFAST LOVE HAS BECOME OUR COMFORT, ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE TO HIS SERVANTS (Psalm 119:76). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD'S HANDS HAVE FASHIONED US. HE HAS GIVEN US UNDERSTANDING SO THAT WE MAY LEARN HIS COMMANDMENTS (Psalm 119:73). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:89-112

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD EXISTS FOREVER; HIS WORD IS FIRMLY FIXED IN HEAVEN. HIS FAITHFULNESS ENDURES TO ALL GENERATIONS (Psalm 119:89-90b). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE WORD OF THE LORD IS A LAMP TO OUR FEET AND A LIGHT TO OUR PATH. WE HAVE SWORN AN OATH AND CONFIRMED IT, TO OBSERVE HIS RIGHTEOUS ORDINANCES (Psalm 119:105-106). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: HERE IS A LIMIT TO ALL PERFECTION, BUT THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD IS VERY BROAD (Psalm 119:96). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD ACCEPTS OUR CALL FOR OFFERINGS OF PRAISE AND TEACHES US HIS ORDINANCES (Psalm 119:108).

LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:113-136

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE DECREES OF THE LORD ARE WONDERFUL;
THEREFORE OUR SOUL DESIRES TO KEEP THEM. THE UNFOLDING OF GOD'S WORD
GIVES LIGHT; IT IMPARTS UNDERSTANDING TO THE SIMPLE (Psalm 119:129-130).
LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD WILL TURN TO US AND BE GRACIOUS TO
US, AS IS HIS CUSTOM TOWARD THOSE WHO LOVE HIS NAME (Psalm 119:132). LET
US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD REDEEMS US FROM HUMAN
OPPRESSION, SO THAT WE MAY KEEP HIS PRECEPTS. (Psalm 119:134)
GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD WILL KEEP OUR STEPS STEADY
ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE, HE WILL MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON HIS
SERVANTS, AND TEACH US HIS STATUTES (Psalm 119:133a, 135). LET US BRING GIFTS
FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:137-152

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS AND HIS JUDGMENTS ARE RIGHT. HE HAS APPOINTED HIS DECREES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND IN ALL FAITHFULNESS (Psalm 119:137-138).

LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AN EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HIS LAW IS THE TRUTH (Psalm 119:142).

LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD'S DECREES ARE RIGHTEOUS FOREVER; HE GIVES US UNDERSTANDING THAT WE MAY LIVE (Psalm 119:144).

GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD'S PROMISE IS WELL TRIED, AND HIS SERVANT LOVES IT (Psalm 119:140). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 119:153-176

CALL TO WORSHIP: OUR LIPS WILL POUR FORTH PRAISE, BECAUSE THE LORD TEACHES US HIS STATUTES. OUR TONGUE WILL SING OF HIS PROMISE, FOR ALL HIS COMMANDMENTS ARE RIGHT (Psalm 119:171-172). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD SEEKS OUT HIS SERVANTS BECAUSE WE HAVE GONE ASTRAY LIKE LOST SHEEP; YET WE DO NOT FORGET HIS COMMANDMENTS (Psalm 119:176). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE MERCY OF THE LORD IS GREAT. THE LORD WILL GIVE US LIFE ACCORDING TO HIS JUSTICE (Psalm 119:156). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THOSE WHO LOVE GOD'S LAW HAVE GREAT PEACE AND NOTHING CAN CAUSE THEM TO STUMBLE (Psalm 119:165). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 120, 121

CALL TO WORSHIP: OUR HELP COMES FROM THE LORD WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH (Psalm 121:2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS OUR KEEPER; THE LORD IS OUR SHADE AT OUR RIGHT HAND (Psalm 121:5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE SUN SHALL NOT STRIKE US BY DAY, NOR THE MOON BY NIGHT (Psalm 121:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD KEEPS US FROM ALL EVIL; HE KEEPS OUR LIFE (Psalm 121:7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 121, 122

CALL TO WORSHIP: I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID TO ME, "LET US GO TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD!" OUR FEET ARE STANDING WITHIN YOUR GATES, O JERUSALEM (Psalm 122:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE LIFT UP OUR EYES TO THE HILLS – FROM WHERE WILL OUR HELP COME (Psalm 121:1)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: OUR HELP COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH (Psalm 121:2). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD WILL KEEP OUR GOING OUT AND OUR COMING IN FROM THIS TIME ON AND FOREVER MORE (Psalm 121:8). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 122, 123

CALL TO WORSHIP: I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID TO ME, "LET US GO TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD!" OUR FEET ARE STANDING WITHIN YOUR GA'TES, O JERUSALEM (Psalm 122:1, 2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: JERUSALEM---BUILT AS A CITY THAT IS BOUND FIRMLY TOGETHER... THERE THE THRONES FOR JUDGMENT WERE SET UP, THE THRONES OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID (Psalm 122:3, 5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL HAVE MERCY UPON US, FOR WE HAVE HAD MORE THAN ENOUGH CONTEMPT. OUR SOUL HAS MORE THAN ITS FILL OF THE SCORN OF THOSE WHO ARE AT EASE, OF THE CONTEMPT OF THE PROUD (Psalm 123:3, 4). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: AS THE EYES OF SERVANTS LOOK TO THE HAND OF THEIR MASTER, AS THE EYES OF A MAID TO THE HAND OF HER MISTRESS, SO OUR EYES LOOK TO THE LORD OUR GOD, UNTIL HE HAS MERCY UPON US (Psalm 123:2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 124, 125

CALL TO WORSHIP: OUR HELP IS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH (Psalm 124:8). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: BLESSED BE THE LORD, WHO HAS NOT GIVEN US AS PREY TO THE TEETH OF THE WILD FORCES OF DESTRUCTION (Psalm 124:6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WE HAVE ESCAPED LIKE A BIRD FROM THE SNARE OF THE FOWLERS; THE SNARE IS BROKEN, AND WE HAVE ESCAPED (Psalm 124:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: IF IT HAD NOT BEEN THE LORD WHO WAS ON OUR SIDE, WHEN OUR ENEMIES ATTACKED US, THEN THEY WOULD HAVE SWALLOWED US UP ALIVE, WHEN THEIR ANGER WAS KINDLED AGAINST US; THEN THE FLOOD WOULD HAVE SWEEPED US AWAY, THE TORRENT WOULD HAVE GONE OVER US; THEN OVER US WOULD HAVE GONE THE RAGING WATERS (Psalm 124:2-5). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 126, 127

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US, AND WE REJOICE (Psalm 126:3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IT IS IN VAIN THAT WE RISE UP EARLY AND GO LATE TO REST, EATING THE BREAD OF ANXIOUS TOIL; FOR HE GIVES SLEEP TO HIS BELOVED (Psalm 127:2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THOSE WHO GO OUT WEeping, BEARING THE SEED FOR SOWING, SHALL COME HOME WITH SHOUTS OF JOY, CARRYING THEIR SHEAVES (Psalm 126:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: LIKE ARROWS IN THE HAND OF A WARRIOR ARE THE SONS OF ONE'S YOUTH. HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO HAS HIS QUIVER FULL OF THEM (Psalm 127:4-5a). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 128, 129

CALL TO WORSHIP: HAPPY IS EVERYONE WHO FEARS THE LORD, WHO WALKS IN HIS WAYS (Psalm 128:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS; HE HAS CUT THE CORDS OF THE WICKED. MAY ALL WHO HATE ZION BE PUT TO SHAME AND TURNED BACKWARD (Psalm 129:4-5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD WILL BLESS YOU FROM ZION. YOU WILL SEE THE PROSPERITY OF JERUSALEM ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE (Psalm 128:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: YOU SHALL EAT THE FRUIT OF THE LABOR OF YOUR HANDS; YOU SHALL BE HAPPY, AND IT SHALL GO WELL WITH YOU (Psalm 128:2). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 130, 131

CALL TO WORSHIP: I WAIT FOR THE LORD, MY SOUL WAITS, AND IN HIS WORD I HOPE; MY SOUL WAITS FOR THE LORD MORE THAN THOSE WHO WATCH FOR THE MORNING, MORE THAN THOSE WHO WATCH FOR THE MORNING (Psalm 130:5-6). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IF YOU, O LORD, SHOULD MARK INIQUITIES, LORD, WHO COULD STAND (Psalm 130:3)? LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: BUT THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY BE REVERED (Psalm 130:4). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: O ISRAEL, HOPE IN THE LORD! FOR WITH THE LORD THERE IS STEADFAST LOVE, AND WITH HIM IS GREAT POWER TO REDEEM (Psalm 130:7). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 132, 133

CALL TO WORSHIP: LET US GO TO THE LORD'S DWELLING PLACE; LET US WORSHIP AT GOD'S FOOTSTOOL. O LORD, LET YOUR PRIESTS BE CLOTHED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND LET YOUR FAITHFUL SHOUT FOR JOY (Psalm 132:7, 9). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: HOW VERY GOOD AND PLEASANT IT IS WHEN KINDRED LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY! IT IS LIKE THE PRECIOUS OIL ON THE HEAD, RUNNING DOWN UPON THE BEARD, ON THE BEARD OF AARON, RUNNING DOWN OVER THE COLLAR OF HIS ROBES (Psalm 133:1-2). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: IT IS LIKE THE DEW OF HERMON, WHICH FALLS ON THE MOUNTAINS OF ZION. FOR THERE THE LORD ORDAINED HIS BLESSING, LIFE FOREVERMORE (Psalm 133:3). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: FOR THE LORD HAS CHOSEN ZION; HE HAS DESIRED IT FOR HIS HABITATION: "I WILL ABUNDANTLY BLESS ITS PROVISIONS; I WILL SATISFY ITS POOR WITH BREAD. ITS PRIESTS I WILL CLOTHE WITH SALVATION, AND ITS FAITHFUL WILL SHOUT FOR JOY" (Psalm 132:13, 15-16). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 134, 135

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD; GIVE PRAISE, O SERVANTS OF THE LORD, YOU THAT STAND IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, IN THE COURTS OF THE HOUSE OF OUR GOD. PRAISE THE LORD, FOR THE LORD IS GOOD; SING TO HIS NAME, FOR HE IS GRACIOUS (Psalm 135:1-3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: FOR I KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GREAT; OUR LORD IS ABOVE ALL GODS. WHATEVER THE LORD PLEASES HE DOES, IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, IN THE SEAS AND ALL DEEPS (Psalm 135:5-6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: FOR THE LORD WILL VINDICATE HIS PEOPLE, AND HAVE COMPASSION ON HIS SERVANTS (Psalm 135:14). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: COME, BLESS THE LORD, ALL YOU SERVANTS OF THE LORD, WHO STAND BY NIGHT IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (Psalm 134:1)! LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 136

CALL TO WORSHIP: O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Psalm 136:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: IT IS THE LORD WHO REMEMBERED US IN OUR LOW ESTATE, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Psalm 136:23). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: IT IS THE LORD WHO RESCUES US FROM ALL OUR SINS, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Psalm 136:24). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: IT IS THE LORD WHO GIVES FOOD TO ALL FLESH, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER (Psalm 136:25). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 137, 138

CALL TO WORSHIP: BOW DOWN BEFORE THE HOLY TEMPLE OF THE LORD AND GIVE THANKS TO HIS NAME FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE AND HIS FAITHFULNESS; FOR THE LORD HAS EXALTED HIS NAME AND HIS WORD ABOVE EVERYTHING (Psalm 138:2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THOUGH THE LORD IS HIGH, HE REGARDS THE LOWLY (Psalm 138:6a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THOUGH WE WALK IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLE, THE LORD PRESERVES US AGAINST THE WRATH OF OUR ENEMIES; HE STRETCHES OUT HIS HAND, AND HIS RIGHT HAND DELIVERS US (Psalm 138:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: ON THE DAY WE CALLED, THE LORD ANSWERED US, HE INCREASED OUR STRENGTH OF SOUL (Psalm 138:3). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 139

CALL TO WORSHIP: IT IS THE LORD WHO FORMED OUR INWARD PARTS; WHO KNIT US TOGETHER IN OUR MOTHERS' WOMBS. PRAISE THE LORD, FOR WE ARE FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE (Psalm 139:13-14). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WHERE CAN WE GO FROM THE LORD'S SPIRIT? OR WHERE CAN WE FLEE FROM HIS PRESENCE? IF WE ASCEND TO HEAVEN, HE IS THERE; IF WE MAKE OUR BED IN SHEOL, HE IS THERE (Psalm 139:7-8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: IF WE TAKE THE WINGS OF THE MORNING AND SETTLE AT THE FARTHEST LIMITS OF THE SEA, EVEN THERE THE LORD'S HAND SHALL LEAD US, AND HIS RIGHT HAND SHALL HOLD US FAST (Psalm 139:9-10). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: HOW WEIGHTY TO US ARE THE THOUGHTS OF THE LORD! HOW VAST IS THE SUM OF THEM! WE TRY TO COUNT THEM---THEY ARE MORE THAN THE SAND; WE COME TO THE END---WE ARE STILL WITH THE LORD (Psalm 139:17-18). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 140

CALL TO WORSHIP: THE LORD IS OUR STRONG DELIVERER AND COVERS OUR HEADS FOR THE DAILY BATTLES OF LIFE (Psalm 140:7). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD GUARDS US FROM THE HANDS OF THE WICKED AND PROTECTS US FROM THE EVIL FORCES THAT WOULD BRING US DOWN (Psalm 140:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS OUR GOD AND GIVES EAR TO THE VOICE OF OUR SUPPLICATIONS (Psalm 140:6). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: WE KNOW THAT THE LORD MAINTAINS THE CAUSE OF THE NEEDY, AND EXECUTES JUSTICE FOR THE POOR. SURELY THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL GIVE THANKS TO HIS NAME; AND THE UPRIGHT SHALL LIVE IN HIS PRESENCE (Psalm 140:12-13). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 141, 142

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE CALL UPON THE LORD WHO COMES QUICKLY TO US; HE GIVES EAR TO OUR VOICE WHEN WE CALL TO HIM. OUR PRAYERS ARE COUNTED AS INCENSE BEFORE HIM, AND THE LIFTING UP OF OUR HANDS AS AN EVENING SACRIFICE (Psalm 141:1-2). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: WE TURN OUR EYES TOWARD GOD, THE LORD IN WHOM WE SEEK REFUGE. HE WILL NOT LEAVE US DEFENSELESS (Psalm 141:8). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: WHEN WE CRY TO THE LORD, WE AFFIRM THAT HE IS OUR REFUGE, OUR PORTION IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING (Psalm 142:5). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD SAVES US FROM OUR PERSECUTORS, FOR THEY ARE TOO STRONG FOR US. THE LORD BRINGS US OUT OF PRISON, SO THAT WE MAY GIVE THANKS TO HIS NAME (Psalm 142:6b-7a). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 143

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE REMEMBER THE DAYS OF OLD, WE THINK ABOUT ALL THE LORD'S DEEDS, WE MEDITATE ON THE WORKS OF HIS HANDS, WE STRETCH OUT OUR HANDS TO HIM; OUR SOULS THIRST FOR HIM LIKE A PARCHED LAND (Psalm 143:5-6). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYERS IN HIS FAITHFULNESS AND ANSWERS US IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS; BUT NO ONE LIVING IS RIGHTEOUS BEFORE HIM (Psalm 143:1, 2b). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD DOES NOT HIDE HIS FACE FROM US OR LEAVE US IN DESPAIR. HE LETS US HEAR OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE IN THE MORNING AS WE PUT OUR TRUST IN HIM (Psalm 143:7b-8a). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD ANSWERS US QUICKLY; HE DOES NOT HIDE HIS FACE FROM US, BUT TEACHES US THE WAY WE SHOULD GO. HIS GOOD SPIRIT LEADS US ON A LEVEL PATH (Psalm 143:7a, 8b, 10b). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 144

CALL TO WORSHIP: WE WILL SING A NEW SONG TO GOD; LET THE TEN-STRING HARP PLAY TO OUR GOD, THE ONE WHO GIVES VICTORY TO HIS PEOPLE, AND RESCUES THOSE WHO SERVE HIM (Ps. 144:9-10). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS OUR ROCK AND OUR FORTRESS, HE IS OUR SHIELD AND PROTECTOR. THE LORD HAS BOWED THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN. HE HAS REGARD FOR US HUMAN BEINGS AND TAKES THOUGHT FOR US MORTALS (Psalm 144:2, 3, 5). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD STRETCHES OUT HIS HAND FROM ON HIGH; HE SETS US FREE AND RESCUES US FROM THE MIGHTY WATERS, AND FROM HURTFUL DISTRACTIONS (Ps 144:7). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: OUR BARNS ARE FILLED WITH PRODUCE OF EVERY KIND; OUR LIVESTOCK INCREASE BY THOUSANDS, BY TENS OF THOUSANDS IN OUR FIELDS (Psalm 144:13). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 145

CALL TO WORSHIP: GREAT IS THE LORD, AND GREATLY TO BE PRAISED;
HIS GREATNESS IS UNSEARCHABLE (Psalm 145:3). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL, AND HIS COMPASSION IS
OVER ALL THAT HE HAS MADE (Psalm 145:9). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND
BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL,
SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 145:8). GOOD
NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE EYES OF ALL CREATURES LOOK TO THE LORD,
AND HE GIVES THEM THEIR FOOD IN DUE SEASON. HE OPENS HIS HAND,
SATISFYING THE DESIRE OF EVERY LIVING THING (Psalm 145:15-16). LET US BRING
GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 146

CALL TO WORSHIP: DO NOT PUT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCES, IN MORTALS, IN WHOM THERE IS NO HELP. WHEN THEIR BREATH DEPARTS, THEY RETURN TO THE EARTH; ON THAT VERY DAY THEIR PLANS PERISH (Psalm 146:3-4). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD SETS THE PRISONERS FREE; THE LORD OPENS THE EYES OF THE BLIND (Psalm 146:8a). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD LIFTS UP THOSE WHO ARE BOWED DOWN; THE LORD LOVES THE RIGHTEOUS (Psalm 146:8b). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.** .

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD WATCHES OVER THE STRANGERS; HE UPHOLDS THE ORPHAN AND THE WIDOW, BUT THE WAY OF THE WICKED HE BRINGS TO RUIN (Psalm 146:9). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 147

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! HOW GOOD IT IS TO SING PRAISES TO OUR GOD; FOR HE IS GRACIOUS, AND A SONG OF PRAISE IS FITTING (Psalm 147:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD LIFTS UP THE DOWNTRODDEN; HE CASTS THE WICKED TO THE GROUND (Psalm 147:6). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD TAKES PLEASURE IN THOSE WHO FEAR HIM, IN THOSE WHO HOPE IN HIS STEADFAST LOVE (Psalm 147:11). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: THE LORD BUILDS UP JERUSALEM; HE GATHERS THE OUTCASTS OF ISRAEL. HE HEALS THE BROKENHEARTED, AND BINDS UP THEIR WOUNDS. OUR GOD COVERS THE HEAVENS WITH CLOUDS, PREPARES RAIN FOR THE EARTH, MAKES GRASS GROW ON THE HILLS (Psalm 147:2, 3, 7, 8, 9). LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalm 148

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! PRAISE THE LORD FROM THE HEAVENS; PRAISE HIM IN THE HEIGHTS! PRAISE HIM, ALL HIS ANGELS; PRAISE HIM, ALL HIS HOST (Ps. 148:1-2)! [Or use vv. 11-13, selections] LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE NAME OF THE LORD IS EXALTED; HIS GLORY IS ABOVE EARTH AND HEAVEN (Ps. 148:13b, c). [Or use v. 5] LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: THE LORD HAS RAISED UP A HORN FOR HIS PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE CLOSE TO HIM (Ps. 148:14). [Or use vv. 2-3] GOOD NEWS! WE ARE FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: PRAISE THE LORD FROM THE EARTH, ALL PEOPLES, YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN ALIKE, OLD AND YOUNG TOGETHER (Ps. 148:7, 11, 12)! [Or use v. 14] LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Psalms 149, 150

CALL TO WORSHIP: PRAISE THE LORD! SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG,
HIS PRAISE IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE FAITHFUL. (Ps. 149:1). LET US WORSHIP GOD.

CALL TO CONFESSION: THE LORD TAKES PLEASURE IN HIS PEOPLE; HE
ADORNS THE HUMBLE WITH VICTORY (Ps. 149:4). LET US CONFESS OUR SIN AND
BROKENNESS TO GOD.

WORDS OF GRACE AND HEALING: LET ISRAEL BE GLAD IN ITS MAKER; LET
THE CHILDREN OF ZION REJOICE IN THEIR KING (Ps. 149:2). GOOD NEWS! WE ARE
FORGIVEN AND MADE WHOLE IN JESUS CHRIST. **AMEN.**

CALL FOR OFFERINGS: PRAISE GOD IN HIS SANCTUARY; PRAISE HIM IN HIS
MIGHTY FIRMAMENT (Ps. 150:1)! LET US BRING GIFTS FOR THE MISSION OF
CHRIST'S CHURCH.

Book II Notes

(Notes 1 to 19 are all indicated in the Introduction of Book II.
Works referenced here only by author and date are listed with
complete publication data in the General Bibliography.)

1. David Buttrick served on the Joint Committee of three Presbyterian denominations that developed *The Worshipbook* 1970, 1972. That publication, along with the already existent Consultation on Common Texts, helped start the avalanche of Protestant denominations adapting the new three-year lectionary contained in the *Lectionary for Mass* that was created pursuant to actions of the Vatican II Council of 1963-1964. Daniels 1992a, 7-15, has traced the gradual re-embracing of the liturgical year by the American Presbyterians from 1906 to 1946 and, 1992b, reviews ecumenical developments from the first edition of the Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass* 1969 to the derivative *Revised Common Lectionary* 1992. McManus 1995 discusses the impact of the Vatican II Council in fostering a great increase of Catholic-Protestant conciliar and episcopal interface and shared approaches to preaching and the reading of scripture in worship services. Another Roman Catholic pastor, Harry Winter 2001, has written a thorough survey of cooperative liturgical developments among the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the United States from 1946 to 1993. The following writers provide brief reviews of the process of adapting the Roman lectionary for wider ecumenical use: Horace T. Allen 1983b, 8; Bower 1987, 30-37; Boehringer 1990, 27-32; Langford 1993, 38-41; and West 1997, 13. As Boehringer 1990, 28, notes, the major divergence from the Roman *Lectionary for Mass* in some of the Protestant denominational adaptations and in the successive *Common* versions is in the treatment of the Old Testament: less typological correspondence with the Gospel lections and more representative of the Hebrew Bible in its own integrity. And, 29-30, he reviews some of the thinking of those who would retain the typological pairings of Old Testament readings with Gospel lections and those who objected to such use of the Hebrew Scriptures (also cited in n. 19). More recently, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Episcopal Church of America have transitioned from their particular versions of a three-year lectionary based on *Lectionary for Mass* to *The Revised Common Lectionary*, each incorporating in their worship books both the semi-continuous and the Gospel lection coordinated tracks of the Old Testament readings for the Sundays after Pentecost, and each retaining a separate liturgical calendar of additional feast days (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 2006; *Book of Common Prayer* 2007). I have also referenced this in the Introduction to Book II [§b.1].

2. Among other theories discussed, Reumann briefly summarizes some of the criticisms of Philip Carrington's thesis, put forth in 1952, that Mark's Gospel is a collection of readings for

the liturgical year. He also notes, 121-122, that there is general skepticism of Aileen Guilding's study suggesting the pattern of the Fourth Gospel reflects the triennial synagogue cycle of lessons from the Pentateuch and the prophets. But he acknowledges that there is general recognition among scholars that the Gospel of John is in some part organized around some of the major annual festivals of the Jewish calendar as mile markers in Jesus' ministry. Anyone can read that Gospel and verify this. But, for a quick guide, see the Table of Contents of Raymond E. Brown 1966 "Part Three: Jesus and the Principal Feasts of the Jews" xi-xii. N. T. Wright 1992, 412, has an interesting discussion of the purpose and effect of John's organization of his Gospel around the Jewish feasts: to make a narrative which is, more obviously than the synoptic Gospels, a story about Jesus and the Jewish people of Judaea of his day. Talley 1991, 237, Childs 1992, 254, and Evans & Sanders 1993, 2, all discuss the speculative nature of theories about the Gospels being shaped by liturgies or lectionaries of the synagogue and the early church. James Sanders 1993, 58, n. 50, thinks the dismissal of Guilding's thesis of a three-year lectionary being reflected in the gospel of John should shift attention to a certain work of P. Billerbeck.

3. Sloyan 2000, esp. 28-29, cites his main source on this history as Emil J. Lengeling of the University of Munster, "Pericopes" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967. Reumann also acknowledges some dependence on Lengeling's organization of the material.

4. [¶1] I have retained the term *Old Testament* because the *Hebrew Scriptures* that are part of the Christian canon do not encompass all that are part of the *Hebrew Bible* of the Jews, and the books included in the Christian Bible are not arranged in the same way as they are in the *Hebrew Bible*, and because abandoning the term *Old Testament* can raise questions in some minds about the term *New Testament*. Of course, the *Hebrew Bible* is not an *old* testament to the Jews. It is simply the Bible, or it is *Torah* in the broadest sense of that term. But the title Christian Old Testament used by Brueggemann 2003, 1-3, 260, 263 and 2005, 60, is too bulky and can unintentionally seem to be making a distinction from a non-Christian Old Testament. Alter 1981, ix, adheres to the traditional Jewish practice of avoiding "the Christian designation, Old Testament, which implies that the Old is completed only in the New and that together they comprise one continuous work." And he generally refers to the Hebrew Bible as the Bible. Exchanging the terminology of Old Testament and New Testament for First Testament and Second Testament, as in Sloyan 1991, 121, might have a good intention of suggesting some deference to Jewish sensibilities: New supersedes Old but First place wins over Second place. The good intention miscarries and only intensifies an unwanted competitive connotation. The old mostly discredited, Romans 9-11 notwithstanding, doctrine of supersessionism—the church as the new, successor, and only true Israel—continues to be reflected in our habits of language, as if the Jews today prayed to some other God than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to whom

Christians pray, and as if the Jews today were simply God's rejected and rejecting *former* people. Johnson 1999, 118-119, discusses the early Christian notion of the church's self-identification as the true and authentic Israel in relation to the symbolic world of Torah which they shared with the continuing Jewish community, and in relation to their resurrection faith mediated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit among them, a faith which the continuing Jewish community did not share. Johnson, 237-239, touches on the notion of the Christian movement as the house of Israel, the people of God restored, as witnessed in Peter's sermon in the Pentecost story recorded in Acts 2. Strangely, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) finally disabused itself of the official recognition of the supersessionist teaching in the 1980's following a long delayed north-south reunion.

[¶2] On a related issue, the notion that the Hebrew scriptures are not part of the Christian Bible, Borg 2001, 57, notes that that teaching was rejected by early Christianity in the Marcionite controversy in the second century. However, the false teaching raises its head in groups that aim to restore the church to the precise features described in the New Testament, notwithstanding the fact that the New Testament descriptions of the earliest church include many citations, quotations, allusions, and readings from the scriptures, that is, the Hebrew scriptures. Borg points out several popular stereotypes and misconstruals about the life of God and God's people prior to the time of Jesus that still attach to the name Old Testament as the second reason after deference to the Jews for his usage of Hebrew Bible rather than Old Testament. Willimon's 2005, 14, phrase "the God of the church and Israel" can be taken either as a corrective to or as a vestige of the language habits of an underlying supersessionism since he does not say "the God of Jews and Christians." That is, "Israel" might be taken as referring to ancient Israel of the Hebrew Bible – before the Common Era – but not referring to the Israel or the diaspora Jews of today. Deiss 1976, 286-289, uses the term Old Testament but points out that for Christians there is not really an *old* testament but the two testaments together from a new one, a gospel. Bodman 2010, 10, n. 5, explains that there is no good solution to the naming problem, especially since the books of the first part of the Christian Bible are not ordered in the same way as the books of the Hebrew Scriptures and since the ordering expresses a distinctive theological theme in each version respectively. Thus, ambiguity reigns with regard to naming the first part of the Christian Bible. So, I will continue referring to it as the Old Testament except when quoting or citing a source that uses other nomenclature. Wilson 2007, 219-220, addresses the related issue of "The Cross and the Old Testament" and notes that some heavy-handed Christian preaching of Christ prophecy in the Old Testament, as well as some perspectives seen in the New Testament, may have contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. But he asserts, 219 shaded area, "Denying a christological center to the Old Testament, one may still affirm a christological center to preaching" (also cited in Book I, Chapter II [¶ 14] and Book I, Chapter IV [¶ 53] in re: christocentric interpretation of scripture in preaching).

[¶3] The Introduction to *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, 14, states that it has “provided alternate Old Testament readings for those feasts and rubrics which provide for the unvarying use on those festivals of crucial readings from the Acts of the Apostles as the second reading.” That sentence seems to me ambiguous and misleading. First, I divine that second does not mean second in order of readings in the worship service but secondary to the primary Gospel selection. Then, I note that alternative Old Testament selections that may be used as the secondary reading instead of the reading from Acts are provided only for Easter Sunday and not for the Second to Seventh Sundays. And then I notice that if the Old Testament is read as the first lesson on Easter Sunday, the selection from Acts is read as the second lesson in place of the Epistle selection. On the historical origins and rationale for using the readings from Acts during Easter Season, Skudlarek 1981, 37, n. 10, cites sermons by Augustine and Chrysostom (John of Antioch received the nickname Chrysostom, golden mouth, more than a century after his death, according to Fant and Pinson 1971, vol. 1, 53). McArthur 1958, 39, provides quotations, context, and specific source references of the remarks by Chrysostom and Augustine mentioned by Skudlarek 1981. This indicates that the tradition of substituting lections from Acts for Old Testament readings during Easter season dates from the 4th or 5th century. *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981), Article Number 74, in Hoffman, 1991, 143, explains the retention of the Ambrosian and Hispanic practice as a usage that “results in a clear presentation of how the Church drives the beginning of its entire life from the paschal mystery.” Discussions of the use of readings from the book of Acts in lieu of lections from the Old Testament between Easter and Pentecost can be seen in the following: Nelson 1982, 96; Horace T. Allen 1983b 14-15, and 1996, 9; West 1997, 101-102; Old 1998b, 291-292 and 1999, 152-153; and Bonneau 1998, 77, 86-89. Bonneau, in a revision of his article “The Acts of the Apostles in the Easter Lectionary” in *Celebrate!* (March-April 1989) 8-10, which was largely based on Elmar Nubold, *Entstehung und Bewertung der neuen Perikiopenordnung des romischen Ritus für die Messfeier an Sonn-und Festtagen* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1986), indicates that the purpose served is that the readings from Acts rather than from the Old Testament emphasize that Easter signals the emergence of the Church, a new beginning of the people of God as a result of the resurrection of Christ. West 1997, 101-102, indicates that such an approach and rationale emerged out of especial consideration for the celebration and edification of the newly baptized Christians during Easter season. The weakness of these historic rationales is indicated by the fact that, according to Bonneau, some members of the committee on Lectionary reform objected to retaining or restoring this historic practice since it interferes with the important act of restoring the readings of the Old Testament to the liturgy, and since Old Testament lessons could be selected to embrace the joy of Easter and the awareness that the first Easter signals the appearance of the Church on the stage of history.

5. Other discussions of the unique treatment of the Gospel According to John in the three-year lectionaries are West 1997, 78-9, 81-2, 109-10, 116-7, 128 and Bonneau 1998, 36-37, 72-73. It seems ironic that the three-year lectionaries do not have a fourth year on the Gospel of John since, as Old 1998b, 347, points out “So many of the masters of the art of preaching have done cycles of sermons on the Gospel of John: Origen, (also Augustine, according to the footnote on the same page), John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Bonaventure, Luther, Thomas Chalmers, William Temple, and James Boice...” My quotation of Sloyan 1991, 122 and 1988, 75, in n. 8 below illuminates the deficit that has resulted from the diffuse treatment of the Gospel of John in the 3-year lectionaries.

6. I have used the word canon here in the narrow or static sense of a list of authoritative writings that are included in the church’s authorized scriptures as distinguished from those that are not included and which lack such authority. I discuss other perspectives on the meaning and function of canon in Book I, Chapters I and II, including the fact of de facto inner canons and the idea of an ongoing canonical process in the continuing history of the church’s use and transmission of the scriptures.

7. Horace T. Allen 1996, 17.

8. [¶1] The need for exposure of the full breadth of Scripture may be partly met with readily available Christian education curricula that *do not* simply follow the Sunday lectionary selections, and by available daily prayer lectionaries for personal or family devotional use. But these also seem rather narrowly selective, skipping over portions that are supposed to be inappropriate, awkward or less important in order to cover a wider sampling of scripture within the typical time frame of one or two years. And, perhaps more importantly, if an active Christian discovers a wonderfully enlightening and edifying text of the Bible in an educational setting or in devotional reading would she not be justified and asking why this text is never going to be read or expounded in Sunday service? Does “because it’s not in the lectionary” really answer the question? I think not. Or, what if the text she discovers is very disturbing and problematic? Does “because it is a hard saying” really justify its omission from the daily and Sunday lectionaries? No! I discuss various perspectives on preaching from “hard passages” in n. 17 below.

[¶2] Brilioth 1965a, 202, notes that among Reformation churches only the Church of England preserved a Breviary tradition of daily morning and evening offices of scripture and prayer. Old 2002, 153-157, notes that the daily morning and evening prayer lectionary included in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* continued in use with little change the next 100 years.

Maxwell 1949, 163-170, discusses non-Anglican developments patterned after the daily Quire Offices. He explains the terms quire and office on page 164, and indicates, 165, that the tradition continues in abbreviated form among Lutherans and was abandoned in favor of family prayers, study meetings, and clergy meetings among “Calvinians.” Shepherd 1976a, 53-73, reviews the background and history of the Daily Offices, including the breviaries for personal devotions among clergy, monastic and secular, and laity with especial attention to the coverage and distribution of the Psalms in those schedules of daily readings (also cited in Part III, The Psalms). Incidentally, thinking of the discipline of daily reading in the devotional life of clergy persons, Barth 1991, 95, notes that “Pastors ought to seek guidance from scripture more often for the purpose of preparing their sermons, and he indicates that such a regular widening and renewing of the preacher’s conversation with the full range of scripture is especially important when pastors are selecting their own preaching texts and schedules from time to time rather than using the appointed texts of a calendar lectionary or a continuous series on a book of the Bible.” Bonhoeffer 1972 refers numerous times in his letters to the strength found in meditating on the appointed readings of the day. He also notes somewhere that preachers should read more scripture from day to day than just the appointed daily readings and the appointed passages for Sunday worship and preaching. This might be facilitated by participation in Bible study groups, whether with laity groups or clergy colleagues. I always participate in an adult Sunday school class if I am not teaching a class of children, youth, or adults. When I was growing up attending Southern Baptist Sunday schools one of the structures used to help us develop habits of discipleship and piety (as attentive followers of Jesus with a strong sense of God in our life) was a series of check boxes on the back of our Sunday school offering envelopes, including: present, brought offering, read lesson (in students’ “quarterly”), did daily Bible reading, staying for worship service. I could usually check off present, offering, worship service, but not so much on lesson and Bible reading. But the overall concept got imbedded in my mind and heart, for which I am thankful. The development of habits of regular Bible study and daily devotional Bible reading had to wait until much later in life.

[¶3] James Sanders 1983, 262, once proposed a comprehensive lectionary of daily devotional readings for youth and adults, something like the Roman Catholic Breviary, to help compensate for the scriptural omissions of the Sunday lectionary; and some denominations have since published such daily lectionaries as complements or companions to their versions of the 3-year Sunday and major feast lectionary. For example, Sloyan 2000, 28, reports on the Roman Catholic two-year lectionary for weekday mass that is part and parcel of the new 3-year Lectionary for Mass on Sundays and Solemnities (Saints days and other feasts); and Bonneau 1998, 4, writes in a footnote of the Liturgy of the Hours formerly known as the Breviary which also contains in addition to prayers and psalms scripture selections for each day, prescribed in the Vatican II document *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* Chapter IV, Divine Office, especially

Article 92, which can be seen in Hoffman 1991, 26, or Abbott 1966, 165; and similar two-year daily lectionaries contained in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* 2007 (Daily Office Lectionary) and the Presbyterian *Daily Prayer: The Worship of God, Supplemental Liturgical Resource No. 5*, 1987. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 2006 contains a 3-year Daily Lectionary correlated in part with the Revised Common Lectionary for Sundays and major feasts which it also contains. Kucharek 1971, 214, indicates that the use of daily prayer books was extended to the laity in the Eastern Orthodox churches in ancient times while in the Western Catholic churches the Breviary continued to be the exclusive domain of the clergy and monastic communities. And Maxwell's 1949, 164-165, observation that the great majority of Christians, including most clergy, do not keep or attend the daily offices, is equally true of the more recent daily prayer books and Scripture lectionaries of various denominations.

[¶4] Deiss 1976, 255-266 and 1992, 42-43, makes note of the fact that in practice the chief Sunday service is *the* place where most Christians get the knowledge which they have of God's Word. Koester 1990, 26, asserts that pastors should consider departing from the lectionary to preach on key passages that have been omitted from the 3-year lectionaries and avers that the departure would be in keeping with the spirit of a major purpose in the development of a 3-year lectionary to replace a 1-year lectionary, that is, to expand the horizon of Scripture texts to be read and interpreted at Lord's day services. A note by Sloyan 1988, 75, on the lectionary treatment or neglect of Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John is instructive:

This key New Testament chapter is, surprisingly, not read on any Sunday other than the five in mid-summer of the second or Marcan year (B), namely those that occur between July 24 and August 27 (the 17th-21st of the Year [Ordinary Time] or 10th-14th after Pentecost). These verses (60-69) are read on the Twenty-First Sunday of the Year [Ordinary Time] (or Fourteenth after Pentecost) in all the lectionaries. Summer preaching schedules are affected by clergy vacations and the appearances of guest preachers, not to speak of oppressive weather in some regions. These factors may result in diminished attention to a central Johannine treatment of right faith in the rabbi Jesus (v. 25). The adverse circumstances should not lessen the attempts of preachers to master the profundities of John 6. It is central to much that the church believes and does, not least in its varieties of eucharistic practice as they epitomize faith in Jesus' person. It should be wrestled with for the riches it contains and shared -- whatever the weather is like at 'home beach' or the resorts. ([Ordinary Time] added)

On the other hand, it is the importance of the Johannine passage on the bread of life that prompted its substitution for Mark's account of the feeding of the 5,000 here, according to the *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981) Article 105 in Hoffman 1991, 152. There is a fuller

explanation of that lectionary choice in Bonneau 1998, 149.

[¶5] But it must be acknowledged that the practice of including only selected portions of a community's sacred writings in the schedule for public reading in worship has a long tradition. James Sanders 1972, 97, cites a comment by Philo as indicating that in early Judaism the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were traditions recited directly in cultic worship and the other writings were considered instructive and edifying but not necessarily used in public worship. But Sanders also notes, 111, the tradition that evolved in Judaism of appointing particular books of the wisdom writings (the Five Scrolls aka Megilloth: Ruth, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther) to be read in their entirety at certain annual festivals. Barr 1983, 60, and Brueggemann 2003, 274, 319-349, also comment on the Megilloth in the Hebrew liturgical calendar.

9. [¶1] The *intention* of providing for as much continuous or semi-continuous reading as possible in Gospel, Old Testament, and Epistle selections is expressed in *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992 Introduction, especially Articles 20, 30, 31, and 32, pp. 12-15. The intention is fulfilled rather feebly and does very little, for example, that would change Koester's 1990, 21-22, sampling of specific examples of how the snippet and expurgation system divorces passages of the Fourth Gospel from their literary context. Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 129-132, have a brief discussion of preaching continuously through a book of the Bible. Old 1998a, 94-105, notes the history of both continuous and festal readings in the synagogue in pre-Christian and early Christian times. James Sanders 1993, 62, suggests the possibility that the Old Testament in Greek translation (Septuagint) was read aloud in sequential installments in the community of Luke. Jungman 1959, 42, discusses the early Christian use of the system of *lectio continua de scriptura* readings, citing and quoting the second description of Sunday worship practice in the *First Apology* of Justin c. 65. He also discusses, 166-167, the teaching and prophetic function of *lectio continua de scriptura* reading and preaching in early Christian worship both in building up the church and in transforming pagan society, and in producing the byproduct of commentaries on whole books of the Bible done by the early church spiritual/theological teachers aka fathers, including Cyril of Alexandria whose teaching and preaching are also described in Old 1998b, 108-125. Old 1998a, 173, also notes that Chrysostom preached and taught daily, mostly *lectio continua de scriptura* through books of the Bible, but would interrupt a series when needed to do catechetical, festal, or prophetic preaching and teaching. Old 1999, 363, observes that one of the few *lectio continua de scriptura* examples that has come down to us from the High Middle Ages is Bonaventure's series of seventy-nine sermons on the Gospel of John. He also notes, 572, among pre-Reformation preachers in the late Middle Ages the series of Sunday evening sermons on the book of Revelation by Savonarola railing against the excesses of church, society, and state during the Renaissance; and, 573, a series by Savonarola in Lent of 1492 on the book of Genesis.

Bonneau 1998, 4-19, discusses the ups and downs of sequential reading (*lectio continua de scriptura*) in Christian liturgical history. Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 4, note that for Zwingli and Calvin, the restoration of *lectio continua de scriptura* reading and preaching was essential to a restoration of the absolute authority of the Bible in church teaching and worship “because the medieval lectionary was made up of small bits of scripture taken out of context,” and was not conducive to a proper hearing of biblical truth by the people. On the other hand, N. T. Wright 1996, 14-15, asserts that the 16th century reformers failed to investigate why the Gospel writers arranged their material on Jesus into continuous narrative stories rather than simply collections of teachings and lists of works. Thus, while many Protestant reformers dispensed with the liturgical year and its lectionary and turned to continuous preaching and teaching through books of the Bible, they still tended to treat each teaching or preaching pericope as an isolated source or self-contained nugget of divine truth, not unlike the snippet treatment sometimes associated with calendar based lectionaries which might at least claim to respect the narrative intentions of the Gospel writers in part because they are structured pivotally around the mighty saving acts of God in redemption—the Easter cycle—and incarnation/final consummation—the Christmas cycle.

[¶2] But whether the narrative intentions of the Gospel writers are respected in particular sermons and lectures following the lectionary is another matter. Thompson 1971, 129, notes that while Luther's German Mass as used at Wittenberg retained the Roman lectionary with preaching from the Epistle lection at the earliest service, 5 or 6 a.m., and preaching from the Gospel lection at the Mass of 8 or 9 a.m., there was preaching from the Old Testament in "proper order," *lectio continua de scriptura*, at Vespers in the afternoon. Maxwell 1949, 91, notes an increase in longer and more continuous lections in the rites of the German mass at Strasbourg as Bucer, building on previous work by Diebold Schwartz who was influenced by Zwingli, modified the rites that were shaped by Luther, Strasbourg being an important place along with Heidelberg where the Evangelical (Lutheran) and Reforming (Calvinist) sides of the Reformation met and influenced each other. Thompson 1971, 170, shows that Bucer championed the primacy of the Gospels and ordinarily preached from a passage of one of the Gospels which was to be read continuously from Sunday to Sunday. Maxwell also notes, 114, that Calvin had Bucer's Strasbourg German language rite translated so he could use it in developing his Strasbourg French language rite. Old 2002, 63, notes that part of the liturgical reforms contained in the Reformation Act of 1529 was to endorse the practice of preaching through one book after another, thus giving Oecolampadius an official stamp to follow the example of his predecessor at the Basel cathedral, Wolfgang Capito, as well as the example of the preaching hero of them both, the Greek spiritual/theological teacher, aka father, John Chrysostom (also referenced in Book I, Chapter III [¶ 1]). Brilioth 1965a, 245, notes that the earlier liturgies of the Swedish Reformation provided for *lectio continua de scriptura* readings and a fixed collect before returning to *lectio selecta de tempore* (calendar based) liturgies. It is from Brilioth 1965a, 241, that I took my cue in adding *de tempore*

to *lectio selecta* for the purpose of specifying the liturgical calendar as the basis for selecting texts. McArthur 1958, 26, notes that the continuous reading and preaching from Old and New Testaments was strongly enjoined in the Scottish Reformation where the Christian Year was completely rejected, and includes a quotation from the *Book of Discipline* of 1560, which is in Scottish dialect, a quotation that he got by way of W. D. Maxwell's 1931 work *John Knox's Genevan Service Book 1556*. Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 38, note that one of Thomas Cranmer's principles of liturgical reform, set forth in the preface of his first *Book of Common Prayer*, was that the whole Bible should be read in continuity. *The Westminster Directory* (for Worship) of 1644, a product mainly of the English Puritan party, made it "requisite that all the Canonical books bee read over in order, that the people may be better acquainted with the whole body of the Scriptures: And ordinarily, where the Reading in either Testament endeth on one Lord's day, it is to begin the next," which see in Thompson 1971, 358.

[¶3] While *lectio continua de scriptura* preaching was done widely in the Sunday worship services of Patristic and Reformation times according to Dargan 1904, Edwards 2004 and Old 1998b and 2002, some of the examples cited are of series presented at weekday meetings rather than at Sunday morning services. For example, Old 1998a, 321, discusses the likelihood that Origen's long series on the Gospel of Luke was done at daily services, either morning or evening prayers. Otherwise the series of close to 150 sermons would have taken about three years of Sunday morning or evening services. Thompson 1971, 129-130, indicates that much of the preaching and teaching schedule prescribed in Luther's *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe* was to take place at certain weekday services rather than at Sunday services. And Dargan 1904, 414, notes that H. Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, who in the first ten years of his leadership of the Reformation at Zurich had gone through nearly all the books of the Bible, often preached six, and sometimes even seven or eight, times a week. On the other hand, Old 1999, 146, n., thinks that some scholars have gone too far in concluding that most or all of the continuous reading and preaching in the first four hundred years of the church was not done at Sunday eucharistic services; but at daily prayer services. Ritschl 1963, 88, asserts that because Sunday only eventually emerged as the proper day of worship, no radical distinction should be made between week-day meetings and Sunday meetings in the earliest church. But it is not just a matter of the earliest church. Old 2002, 46, acknowledges that much of the vaunted continuous preaching/teaching of the Bible in the Reformation period was done by daily preaching, not weekly, including Zwingli's gigantic coverage of much of the Bible. Old 2004, 28-34, discusses Matthew Henry's (1662-1714) practice of delivering both a sermon and a theological lecture at both morning and evening Sunday services: a *lectio continua de scriptura* exposition early in the service and a doctrinal exposition of continuous selections from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the sermons being eventually published in the six volume set *Exposition of the Bible*. Old 2004, 54-64, also records how Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801), preaching in Zurich

some 200 years after Zwingli, managed to maintain the Reforming tradition of *lectio continua de scriptura* preaching and the equally Reforming tradition of interspersing festal sermons, sermons on current affairs, and pastoral sermons. Old 2004, 499-501, notes how Andrew Thomson (Scotland, 1779-1831) helped to revive *lectio continua de scriptura* preaching which had fallen into disuse due partly to the slow progression of series resulting from the shortness of texts, by taking much longer pericopae, thus restoring a practice closer to that of the early and Reformation periods than that of the 18th Century. Killinger 1996, 20-24, discusses the values of *lectio continua de scriptura* preaching, with quotations from P.T. Forsyth 1957, 19, and Alexander Whyte via A. J. Gossip 1925, 85. Von Allmen 1962, 47-48, discusses advantages and disadvantages of extended *lectio continua de scriptura* series at Sunday services, the main disadvantage being the problem of maintaining congregational attention and interest when a continuous series on one book of the Bible extends beyond two or three months. He proposes the remedy of breaking up the series by focusing on an Old Testament book September to Advent, a Gospel book Epiphany to Passion, and an Epistle in summer (also referenced in n. 14 and by West 1997, 187-188), which is similar to the plan of several other lectionaries without the hopping and skipping within the book series. Ronald Allen 1998, 109-111, notes that “*Lectio continua* often accompanies regeneration in the church,” including in evangelical and other communities today. He also mentions examples from the Reformation period and the 20th century example of Karl Barth whose “theological rediscovery took place in conjunction with preaching through Romans.” Old 2010, 450-451, 497-498, reports on a revival of *lectio continua de scriptura* expository sermon series on books of the Bible among evangelical and charismatic preachers in Britain and in some of the non-denominational/independent/community mega churches in the United States during the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

10. [¶1] Sloyan 1977, 136, summarizes: “In a word, the snippet principle and the thematic principle conspire to dilute woefully the riches of the Israelite and the Christian religions. The Bible’s greatness can come through only when large portions are read regularly and uninterruptedly.” Langford 1993, 44, indicates that narrative and canonical critics helped the task force to reduce the snippet or hopping and skipping effect of start and cut off points of the lections in *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1993, but the resultant product is far from free of those effects. Alter 1981, 11, acknowledges that while the midrashic scholars did assume the unity of the text and recognize certain subtle linguistic cues to its interconnectedness,

they had little sense of it as a real narrative continuum, as a coherent unfolding story in which the meaning of earlier data is progressively, even systematically, revealed or enriched by the addition of subsequent data. What this means practically is that the

Midrash provides exegesis of specific phrases or narrated actions but not continuous *readings* of the biblical narratives: small pieces of the text become the foundations of elaborate homiletical structures that have only an intermittent relation to the integral story told by the text.

N. T. Wright 2005, 132 and 2006, 97-98, observes that the church's practice of cutting up the Gospel texts for worship and preaching has this in common with the extra canonical Gospels such as those in the Nag Hammadi Library and similar texts: it takes Jesus out of his real life context as a Palestinian Jew in the Greco-Roman world of the early first century and thus tends to obscure what it is that the four canonical Gospels are really talking about.

[¶2] But notice also that while the snippet principle at work in the development of various pericope systems, whether ordered by the liturgical calendar or by canonical continuity, may violate the intentions of the final redactors of the canon, the process of snipping and arranging is essentially the same as was used in the process of developing a written canon out of originally oral accounts and disparate documents. E. P. Sanders 1993, 59-60, describes how pericopes (cut arounds) or units of material from the oral tradition that had been written down in small pieces were grouped together according to subject matter to form the collections that were then drawn on and arranged in some kind of sequence to form the Gospels; and how these pericopes can be cut out of one place in a collection and relocated to another place. A specific example of this snip and relocation process in the development of the canonical text can be seen in Craddock 1990, 192-193, where Luke 16:14-18 is first acknowledged as setting or prologue to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), and then seen to be an insertion here, some of which is taken from Jesus' sayings elsewhere, on divorce, and some of which follows or is contrary to teachings in Deuteronomy or in other deuteronomic material. Caird 1963, 21-22, while pointing out some overreaching by the form critics, notes that we may acknowledge that they made a positive contribution to our knowledge of the nature of the Gospels by detecting that the Gospel writers and the communities behind them assembled historical narratives out of collections of sayings, poems, sermon illustrations, etc. So, we may acknowledge the positive contributions being made by modern lectionary organizers, syllabus writers, lesson planners, and preachers in reversing that Gospel writer process of constructing historical narratives by breaking things down (deconstructing but not demolishing) into manageable units ("snippets") for the purposes of teaching and preaching.

[¶3] The snippet principle at work in the lectionary selections doesn't seem to bother the disturbingly large number of preachers, homileticians, biblical scholars, and liturgical specialists who see the three-year lectionaries' more lavish spread of readings on the banquet table of God's word (Vatican II, Constitution on the Liturgy, Article 51, which can be seen in Hoffman 1991, 20 and Abbot 1966, 155; and as cited in Wiéner 1991, 2-3; and as reflected in the guidelines for

the work of the post Vatican II work group Coetus XI referenced in Bonneau 1998, 25-27) for each Sunday as an opportunity for preachers to choose each week one among the appointed Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel lections, or a few verses of one of them or a combination of two or more of them, as the scriptural basis for the Sunday sermon on a topic or situation that needs attention. Fuller 1974, Skudlarek 1981, and Robert McAfee Brown 1994[a or b] also seem to embrace this smorgasbord view of how preachers and teachers might use the appointed readings for each Sunday. Skudlarek 1981, 42 f., notes approvingly how a preacher might find connections between the paired Gospel and Old Testament lessons and the not directly related *lectio continua* Epistle lection. Craddock 2010, 116, also tries to strike a balance between preaching exclusively on one of the readings in the lectionary quire and allowing one or more of the other appointed texts to make an appearance in the sermon. I fail to see how this manner of using the lectionaries in sermon development is any improvement over various *ad hoc* thematic, topical, and situational approaches, all of which tend to subvert any serious intention to develop a sermon from a principal scripture lection with exegetical, theological, and homiletic integrity. On the other hand, Sloyan 1984, 39-40, advises ministers not to try preaching on all three lections of the day but urges that they should by all means preach on one of them. Yet, even this well-intentioned advice is tainted by the implication that one might, in any given week, choose among the three readings which one would be best to expound on Sunday rather than continue with a series on one book of the Bible, that is, on the selections from either the Gospel, the Epistle, or the Old Testament. Ronald Allen 1998, 251, also mentions, as one approach to determining a text for the sermon, selecting from among the three lections of the day. I wish that he and Sloyan had disparaged that approach as being inevitably shallow and abusive to the design and spirit of the three-year lectionaries. There are seasons when a preacher might choose to preach a series on a “semi-continuous” run of the Epistle or Old Testament lections, but to treat the lectionary as a weekly buffet from which to select a main dish is not worthy of gospel preaching. Nelson 1982 discusses several problems with texts in lectionary pairs for worship and preaching including, 95-96, the limitation on the range of Old Testament texts used and the distortion or constriction of the interpretation of those Old Testament texts that are used because correspondence with the Gospel lection has such a controlling influence on both the selection and the treatment of the Old Testament readings. Nelson, 96, takes a dim view of trying to preach on the supposed common theme of the Gospel and Old Testament readings, or juggling three readings, Gospel, Epistle, Old Testament, in one sermon, which some printed or digital lectionary “helps” seem to encourage. As mentioned in n. 9, Thompson 1971, 129, indicates that Luther's German Mass as used at Wittenberg would have each Epistle and Gospel lection preached on at a different morning service on Sunday with the Old Testament treated in proper (continuous) order in the afternoon (Vespers) service. Ritschl 1963, 162, declares his opposition to any attempt to counterbalance the focus of the principal text and sermon with other readings or

music selections in the liturgy. I discuss the snippet principle in pericope systems further in Book I, Chapter III.

11. Bonneau 1998, 159-160; Bailey 1977 especially Section B.6, 151-152. The challenge of expository preaching following *lectio continua de scriptura* readings of suitable length mentioned in Problems 4 and 5 of the Book II Introduction and referenced here and in n. 9 and n. 10 is discussed further in Book I, Chapter IV.

12. The development of this work began under the nondescript title of *An Alternative Lectionary*. Then, for many years, the developmental work proceeded under a more descriptive but somewhat cumbersome title: *A Foursquare and Liberating Lectionary*. The term *Foursquare* was intended in the contemporary sense of “marked by boldness and conviction” but more especially in the biblical sense of completeness as in the city foursquare of Ezekiel 48:30-35 and Revelation 21:16 since the horizon of possible scheduled texts for worship and preaching in this lectionary is the whole Christian Bible of Old and New Testaments. The connotation of foursquare completeness might also be attached to the fact that the four Gospels are scheduled in their entirety in four cycles of four liturgical half-years for a total of sixteen half-years which equals four to the second power ($16 = 4^2$, i.e., four squared). But the term foursquare was *not* intended to evoke the foursquare pillars of twentieth century Pentecostalism enumerated in Edwards 2004, 576, or the adaptation of those pillars in the standards of the foursquare churches framed by the Aimee Semple McPherson evangelistic organization and enumerated in Old 2010 [vol. 7], 401. The word *Liberating* in that title stems from the fact that this lectionary invites and encourages worship planners and preachers to select Epistles for *lectio continua de scriptura* reading and preaching during the summer months and Old Testament books for the same during the fall months. Then, later, the work proceeded for a short time under the title *The Whole Bible Lectionary*, which seemed equally presumptuous but perhaps less pretentious than *Foursquare and Liberating*.

Finally, since this lectionary does not specifically designate every verse of the Bible in a worship and preaching passage but only presents a scheme that *allows* for and *encourages* worship and preaching from any and all parts of the Bible, I settled on the title *The Open Bible Lectionary: A Plan for All Seasons*. If that conjures the image, mentioned in Book I, Chapter IV, of an open Bible on the pulpit when the minister stands to preach, that’s a good thing too. Of course, I also respect the liturgical practice of reading the Bible or lectionary book or Gospel book from a preaching lectern or ambo and then reverently closing it and placing it on a side table before the sermon or homily is spoken. The reasons why I would be personally discomfited by the scene of a minister in a Sunday morning service walking around preaching while lifting up an open Bible in one hand, Billy Graham style, clearly an effective gesture when preaching at

an evangelistic crusade in a stadium, are given in Book I, Chapter IV.

The subtitle *A Plan for All Seasons* reflects the fact that *The Open Bible Lectionary* provides for the traditional Christological seasons with principal lections from the Gospels during the six months from Advent to Pentecost, and provides for another historic tradition, that of expository preaching through selected books of the Bible, with a three-month season of continuous reading and preaching from a book selected from Epistles, including Acts, the second installment of Luke's letter to Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1) and Revelation, John's letter "to the seven churches that are in Asia" (Revelation 1:4), and a three-month season of continuous reading and preaching from a book selected from the Old Testament. *A Plan for All Seasons* is also a poetic allusion to the title of Robert Bolt's play, movie, and television drama *A Man for All Seasons* about Sir Thomas More the 16th century Lord Chancellor of England who was executed because his conscience would not allow him to endorse King Henry VIII's intention to divorce his wife Catharine of Aragon, who did not bear him a son, so that he could marry Anne Boleyn. Bolt drew the title of his play from the writing of More's contemporary, Robert Whittington: "More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. I know not his fellow. For where is the man of that gentleness, lowliness and affability? And, as time requireth, a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes, and sometime of as sad gravity. A man for all seasons." (according to Wikipedia, under *A Man for All Seasons* (play), accessed July 4, 2025). Where does the reader see More's twenty-first century "fellows" showing up in any of the polluted, stagnant, ossified and corrupt institutions of our time and taking a stand of defiance against the illegal and immoral demands of their autocratic institutional overseers?

13. I will sometimes refer to Acts, Epistles, and Revelation collectively as Epistles (n. 12 above) since other terms such as New Testament writings and apostolic writings (Bonneau 1998, 38, and *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 1975, Article 318 and *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* 1981, Articles 66.1, 67 in Hoffman 1991, 98 and 141) are equally ambiguous, as if the four Gospels and Acts were not New Testament writings or were not written in apostolic times and attached to the names of apostles. Deiss 1992, 40, mentions "the Pauline corpus or other New Testament texts," but only the context of his remark makes clear that "other New Testament texts" does not include the Gospels. Thus, ambiguity reigns.

14. [¶1] Gray 1991 reviews the two-year lectionary (1967) and the four-year lectionary (1990) of the Joint Liturgical Group in the United Kingdom, both of which schedule Epistles for preaching following Pentecost and Old Testament for preaching from September to Advent. Bower 1987, 271, includes in his extensive Bibliography on Lectionaries: "The Joint Liturgical Group, *The Calendar and Lessons for the Church Year*, London: S.P.C.K., 1969." This would be the earlier, two-year version. But I have not been able to see it. Boehringer 1990, 31,

comments on interest in the *Common Lectionary* among Anglicans in Great Britain and in the former British colonies around the world due to dissatisfaction with their recently developed two-year lectionary which was based on a radical restructuring of the calendar. The *Revised Common Lectionary* eventually won the day in the Episcopal Church of America when it was incorporated in the 2007 edition of their *Book of Common Prayer*. That means that the Gospel lection continues to be the dominant or control reading for the chief Sunday service year-round, and there is not a season for preaching a series from an Epistle or a season for preaching a series from an Old Testament book, which the Episcopal Church of America would have if they had adopted either the two-year or the 4-year lectionary of The Joint Liturgical Group. Old 2010 (volume 7) 464-466, reports on a pattern similar to that of the Joint Liturgical Group in the preaching schedules of John R. Stott according to which “one would preach on Old Testament books in the fall, on the Gospels from Christmas to Pentecost, and on Epistles and Revelation from Pentecost through the summer.” That plan can also be seen in Stott 1982, 214-216. Also, Blackwood 1942, 30, proposes fall preaching on themes from an Old Testament book and summer preaching on life situation themes from selected Psalms or Epistles to complement preaching from the Gospels from Advent to Easter Season. Lowry 1992, 27, writes of his early experience with annual sermon planning inspired by Blackwood’s approach, which has the liturgical year beginning in the fall with pre-Advent preaching from the Old Testament, on which I have a comment in Book I. Von Allmen 1962, 47-48, suggests a *lectio continua de scriptura* plan for Ordinary Time in three parts: September to Advent on an Old Testament book, Epiphany to Passion on a Gospel book, and summer on an Epistle book (also referenced in n. 9 and by West 1997, 187-188). Reumann 1977, 127, mentions a provision for Old Testament preaching in a six-year supplemental lectionary developed by Lutherans in Germany. Bieritz 1991, 37-38, translator note, describes the historical background of the German Lutheran practice of providing a one-year lectionary of Gospel, Epistle, and Old Testament lections for liturgical reading only, along with a separate order of preaching texts sometimes referred to with the word *ordo*. Bieritz notes that Luther himself was somewhat impatient with the practice of liturgical readings that were not to be expounded in preaching, yet he never departed from the old lectionary that provided for such reading courses. Luther was known to be very theologically selective in the texts for his preaching, yet Bieritz notes that Luther’s 1526 German Mass provided for preaching from Old Testament books in course (*lectio continua*) at the Sunday afternoon service while there was a sermon on the Epistle of the day at the 5 or 6 a.m. service and a sermon on the Gospel of the day at 8 or 9 a.m. West 1997, 184, reports that the Christian Reformed Church recommends that *The Revised Common Lectionary* be used in the two seasonal cycles of Christmas and Easter (but not in the two Ordinary Time periods). Black 2002, 68-72, gives a rationale based in the Jewish heritage of Christianity for the intertwining of *lectio continua de scriptura* with *lectio selecta de tempore* in the three-year lectionaries.

[¶2] McArthur 1958, 65-88, has his “Peterhead Lectionary” begin on October 1 with the themes of Creation and Providence, in keeping with his Trinitarian structure following the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, but does not provide for preaching from Old Testament books other than this seven or eight weeks each year on selections from Genesis chapters 1 to 11, supported by additional readings selected from Old and New Testaments. Keller 2015, 39-44, discusses the importance of moving around in the Bible using miniseries in order to cover a wide range of scriptural genres and theological themes in a relatively short period of time, especially in view of the flux of the frequent geographic relocations of people in modern society. And he gives as an example, 246-247, the annual pattern that he has used to accomplish this. The intention of reading and preaching from a wide range of various parts of the biblical saga in a relatively short span is common to most lectionaries and is to be commended. But it seems to me that attempts, such as Keller’s, 246, “core curriculum of gospel Christianity” or McArthur’s “Peterhead Lectionary” to make the preaching program into a syllabus of major theological or historical themes, is misguided. The sections of scripture are not truly susceptible to such categorical divisions as attempted in *The Rainbow Study Bible* 1981 and 1986 and other topical study Bibles and in lectionaries organized by major social or theological themes or historical or narrative divisions. Aside from the questionability of study Bibles and lectionaries organized with an agenda of education in categorical doctrines there are also important cautions about using one’s sermons as occasions to teach people something about systematic or constructive theology. Barth 1991, 75, emphasizes that preachers should expound scripture rather than present their systematic theology; and, 106, he describes how to use the theological teachings (dogma) of one’s own church as guideposts in scripture interpretation for preaching. Wilson 2007, 212, in a chapter on “Preaching to Persuade,” wrote “Generally speaking, systematic or constructive theology needs to inform what is said but cannot be imported directly to the pulpit.” And he goes on in the paragraph to explain why the syntax and vocabulary of constructive theology are not appropriate for preaching. And my point here is that the comprehensive structure of a theological system should not be used in an attempt to organize a calendar of preaching texts for the purpose of instruction in the major divisions of systematic theology. If the preacher continues from day to day to spend time reading in the theological disciplines, the Spirit will reveal to her or him during sermon preparation what theological teachings might help in setting forth the message and intentions of the scriptural text.

15. (This note is indicated at two places in Book II: (1) Introduction, d. 2, and (2) Chapter II. b. “Discussion of Lections and Arrangement by Seasons,” Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year Six, Second Half Year on Mark.)

[¶1] Preaching on a single-verse text, or a single sentence or phrase is not a widely recommended practice these days according to Barth 1991, 93-94; von Allmen 1962, 47; and

Buttrick 1987, 376-7; 1994b, 15, 80. Old 2002 (volume 4), 284, 327, refers to the once common practice of developing a thematic philosophizing sermon out of a brief text as a kind of Protestant scholasticism, exemplified in the work of the Puritan preacher John Preston (1587-1628). (I suggested a 20th century parallel to the philosophically oriented methods of Scholasticism in the correlation method of Paul Tillich, in Book I, Chapter II [¶ 23].) Sloyan 2000, 23, complains about the brevity of some of the pericopes in the three-year lectionaries. Perhaps the brevity of continuous texts in the Puritan scholastic tradition, discussed by Old 2002 (volume 4), 284, 327, had a carryover effect on pericope selections of the three-year lectionaries. Barth 1991, 93-94, states that choosing texts that are too short increases the danger of arrogance in using a text for our own agenda. And he cautions, as an example, against such practices as detaching the first beatitude from the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Yet, it seems to me that while one may preach effectively on all Six Days of Creation, or on all of the Ten Commandments or on the entire Lord's Prayer or on all of the Beatitudes in one sermon, the ancient tradition of preaching a catechetical series on these pivotal sections one article at a time, while always keeping the larger context in view, is not to be denied. And when it comes to the Fourth Sunday of Advent and the two Sundays of Christmas in Year Six, I plead an exception to the caution against short text lections by scheduling a series of three sermons on one verse, Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The three phrases derived from the first verse of the first chapter of the earliest Gospel, The Beginning of the Gospel, The Gospel of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ the Son of God, provide ample material, with help from the commentaries including especially their introductions to Mark's Gospel, to develop three sermons in the context of Advent-Christmas that can convey to the congregation an introduction to the Gospel of Mark and can set the stage for a liturgical half-year of reading and preaching from Mark. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 15-18, provide historical examples of sermon series based on single verse texts, and discuss advantages and disadvantages of always "taking a text," and, 137-141, discuss the possibilities, cautions, and limitations of text sermons. Donald G. Miller 1957, 98-103, discusses why and how the development of a sermon on a one-word or one-phrase text must be guided by the structure and purpose of the larger scriptural context of the short text. Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 260, report that George A. Buttrick "always uses a text and preaches directly from it... He seldom uses more than two verses for his text, and more often it is only one. Regardless of the length of the text, he is bound to that text in a real way for the development of his message." Thus, it is clearly possible to preach from a short text with biblical, theological and liturgical integrity rather than simply use the text as a keynote or springboard for a predetermined thematic, topical, or catechetical/doctrinal sermon. When Old, 2010 (Vol. 7), 407-408, wrote that preaching from a single verse is "the most basic form of expository sermon" he surely must have been using the word basic in the sense of minimal.

[¶2] The caution against single verse preaching is one which some systematic theologians

systematically ignore when they preach. But perhaps that's the nature of their main craft, to be discursive and thematic rather than expository. The same can be said of preachers who have become well known for their single-minded agendas, such as Walter Rauschenbusch, 1861-1918, the "social gospel" exponent, of whom Fant and Pinson 1995, VII, 142, wrote, "It is true that many of the sermons are only essays with text: they do not truly develop the text which they cite. On the other hand, some of his sermons show careful examination of the biblical text of the sermon." Langer 1993, 81, discusses the two aspects of the word discursive: 1. analytical, rational, symbolic, 2. roving, digressive. Barr 1983, 137-145, discusses Karl Barth's disconnection from the conventions of the biblical scholarship academy in his *Romans*, and Rudolph Bultmann's unique way of parsing the text in his *The Gospel of John*, two commentaries that were most useful to me in developing sermons on Romans and John, but with which it was most urgent that I use them in conjunction with other more conventional leading exponents of the respective sections of scripture. When the theologian takes a text for his sermon, perhaps just a word, a phrase, or a sentence, it is often mainly just a fitting keynote or springboard for his discourse. For examples, see books of sermons by Paul Tillich such as *The Shaking of the Foundations*, *The New Being*, and *The Eternal Now* and Karl Barth's sermons that are reprinted in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 108-135. On the other hand, Barth 1991, 103, specifically cautions his preaching seminar participants and his readers against preaching on short texts, "for with such texts we more easily neglect the context." Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 57-58, while noting that few of Tillich's published "sermons are expository in style; most of them are thematic biblical sermons," sometimes using "the text as a springboard for a discussion of the concepts and ideas that he wanted to discuss" also note that in a few instances Tillich followed a verse by verse expository form. It is also worth noting that when expository preaching is taken to mean setting forth or laying open the main message of a text, per Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, Donald G. Miller 1957, and others, which I mentioned in Book I, Chapter IV [¶ 29], rather than explaining the background or technical roots of every detail in a text, the resultant sermon or essay can end up looking a lot like a thematic message; and that's usually a good thing for the purpose of communicating the glad tidings of God's Story. Fant 1975, 9-10, references Mary Bosanquet's observation of the young Dietrich Bonhoeffer's use of brief texts to preach thematic sermons when he was a pastor in Barcelona. Perhaps this may be a tendency of younger preachers who are still brimming over with their favorite theological themes. Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 106, indicate that Bonhoeffer made an intentional shift from his earlier practice of developing his sermons from short texts, and they cite the following quotation of Eberhard Bethge in his article "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers:"

His practice at the beginning was to preach from brief texts of the Bible, but later he tended more and more to base his sermons on the longer passages from the Epistles and

the Gospels that were prescribed by the Lutheran lectionary. He made this decision consciously and deliberately. He was aware of the temptation to discover and to embody his own system of thought in the reading from Scripture, and he wished to minimize this danger as much as possible and to speak only as Scripture spoke to him.

16. Raymond E. Brown 1978, 8, in his book *An Adult Christ at Christmas*, has an explanation of the title of the book that indicates the infancy narratives contain items of incarnational theology that the writers have read back into the nativity stories from the life, death, and resurrection of the “adult” Christ.

17. [¶1] The preponderance of preachers, theologians, scripture scholars and faithful people all through Christian history and across the theological spectrum from modernist liberalism to fundamentalist literalism have agreed in practice if not always in principle that *not* all scripture passages in the canon are equally deserving of being preached in any and every circumstance, if at all. As Haddon Robinson 2001, 54, wrote “While all Scripture is profitable, not every Scripture possesses equal profit for a congregation at a particular time.” That is a consensus that must guide, along with the divine Spirit, anyone who is selecting a passage for use in worship and preaching. Old 1998b (volume 2), 182, observes that Chrysostom tends to overdo the heroism of the biblical patriarchs by ignoring their human foibles, the inclusion of which is part of the genius of the biblical saga as distinct from the genius of Greek mythology and the hero accounts by Homer and Vergil. And so *The Open Bible Lectionary*, which potentially includes every passage in the canon and does not rule out any passage, can provide an opportunity for worship leaders, preachers, and people to proclaim good news and hear what the Spirit may be saying to the churches in the thornier aspects of the Hebrew Bible and the church’s memory of Jesus the Christ as recorded in the New Testament, including the difficulties associated with scripture canon. Long 1983, 97, observes that if we are called to take a problematic passage seriously “the place at which we must begin to take it seriously is precisely at the point where it rubs us the wrong way.” Catherine Robinson 1996, 32, describes some of her experience in wrestling with texts that deeply disturb her and notes the importance of arguing with the passages that don’t fit our current life ways, passages where we wish that Jesus had not said that or wish that God had not done that. She notes that, while such wrestling with a text is a common aspect of serious Bible study, the significant thing for her preaching is that her quibble or gripe with a passage “often becomes the narrative engine that drives the sermon.” Sundberg 1990, 15, laments the omission from the Lutheran version of *Common Lectionary* of Jesus’ hard saying about the reason for speaking in parables, Mark 4:11-12 and parallels (also omitted from *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992); and he notes the irony in the voice of a colleague who was about to preach on that text when he said “Naturally Mark 4:11-12 does not appear in the

lectionary.” Lowry 1992, 15-16, discusses some of the hermeneutical distortions and limitations placed on preaching by the selection, expurgation, and arrangement of texts in the three-year lectionaries. Koester 1990, 21, observes that some of the appointed lessons from the Gospel of John “attempt discreetly to avoid seemingly harsh or unedifying verses, including some that are quite significant theologically.” Barbara Brown Taylor 1993, 106-107, acknowledges the difficulty of some of the passages that *are* appointed in the three-year lectionaries and reluctantly owns that it is important to confront and deal with the hard passages in the Bible just as it is necessary to confront and deal with the hard passages in life. Willimon 2001 and Black 2002 both write cogently about the importance of preachers taking the Bible as it is and of being suspicious of the lectionary’s practice of omitting or abridging passages that are considered too problematic for preaching purposes or inappropriate for the Sunday worship setting, especially the eucharistic service. Articles 76 and 77 in *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981), seen in Hoffman 1991, 143, present rather waffling rationalizations of the decisions to continue the historic practices of church lectionary writers of avoiding difficult texts and omission of problematic verses in the scheduled texts “for pastoral reasons.” Sloyan 1991, 121-122, suggests pastoral guidance and cautions for reconstituting the canonical completeness of passages that have been abridged in the lectionary for “pastoral reasons.” Massey 1974, 18, testifies: “The Christian preacher is rightfully expected to be a responsible (person), using faith to seek more understanding and not structure in doubt a system by which to talk around or ignore certain paradoxical elements in the records about Jesus.” Robert McAfee Brown 1994b, 95-96, recommends extending the prescribed Psalm lection to include the part that was cut off because it reflects a “vindictive God.” That, of course, seems to ignore the liturgical view that the Psalm selection is not scheduled as a fourth lection but is rather to be voiced by the whole assembly as a response to the Old Testament reading. Thus, the problematic portion of the Psalm is not likely to be interpreted or dealt with in the sermon but could be addressed as part of a teaching moment during the worship service. I discuss in Part III, Chapter VI, another liturgical approach that is reflected in the historic practice in some Catholic and Protestant communities of reading or singing all of the psalms in course without omitting any sections. Brueggemann 2005, 86, cites one element of Claus Westermann’s alternative to the Von Rad and G. Ernest Wright scenario of Old Testament theology as “(3) a readiness to take seriously all of the texts of the Old Testament including those that do not fit the regnant construct” (also cited in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 29]).

[¶2] N. T. Wright 2005, 64-67, 118-119, 136, discusses the challenge of reading the “lists” and the more “shocking episodes” of the Old Testament with a respect for their setting and function in the larger narrative of God’s dealings with Israel rather than resorting to interpretive trickery such as the practice of allegorization employed by some of the early Christian teachers, aka fathers; yet he sees some residual usefulness in something like the device used by some of the ancient church’s spiritual/theological teachers aka fathers, especially

Irenaeus, of interpreting scripture by the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), that is, the theological tradition handed down by earlier teachers or the summary statements or confessions of the essential elements of the Christian faith that are seen in the New Testament writings and which are discussed at length in Cullmann 1949 (2018 reprint). Fant and Pinson VI, 10, report that Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), who was sometimes criticized for “spiritualizing” in order to use a text to preach on a moral or doctrinal theme that was not the obvious intent of the text in its scriptural setting, actually defended the use of spiritualizing when it comes to what he called unusual texts, that is, not the usual great texts of the Bible which he agreed required straightforward interpretation (also cited in Book I, Chapter IV [¶ 5]). Von Allmen 1962, 24-25, notes that the gift of the canon limits the written witness to Jesus Christ by the prophets and apostles by excluding some of the writings that exist or once existed and that it is not ours to further limit that written witness by discounting or ignoring any part of the canonical scriptures. He also provides some guidance, 51, for preaching on canonical passages whose authority and authenticity have been questioned by critical scholars. Ronald Allen 1998, 82-95, has a chapter on “Theological Criteria and Interpretive Relationships” in which three theological criteria, are set forth as guides for a candid conversation with the text, and the preaching context in the process of sermon preparation: 1. *Appropriateness to the gospel*, 2. *Intelligibility* and 3. *Moral plausibility*. These criteria are incorporated by Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 38-40, as steps 8 and 9 in their suggested exegetical method for verse by verse preaching. There, they provide some helpful guidance for dealing with hard passages, including the acknowledgement that “the claims of a very few texts are so deeply inappropriate to the gospel, unintelligible, and morally implausible, that the preacher must speak against them.” Specifically, and most helpfully, the three theological criteria are recast as questions for analyzing the claims of a passage theologically to determine what tasks must be done in order to preach from the passage, especially useful with respect to “hard” passages: (1) “are the claims of the passage appropriate to (consistent with) the gospel?” (2) “is the text intelligible to the congregation?” and (3) “does the text call for the moral treatment of all in its world?” Note well: these three questions are not to help determine whether the passage can be preached from but rather to discern some of the hermeneutical work that must be accomplished in the sermon development, as spelled out by Allen and Bartholomew 2000, 39-41. Wilson 2007, 153, cites Catherine Gunsalus Gonzalez’s *Difficult Texts: A Preaching Commentary* 2005, and summarizes her suggested steps in developing a sermon on a tough text: “First, voice as many reasons as one can think of as to why the text is wrong or does not apply. Then bring in other biblical texts to give perspective. Next deal with the text in depth. Finally apply the text to today.” Further, it seems to me that Wilson’s own comprehensive approach to scripture interpretation in the work of sermon preparation—literary historical canonical exegesis followed by theological exegesis that is infused with a gospel hermeneutic—seen especially in his Chapters One, Two, Three, Twelve and Thirteen,

may provide the best path to taming a hard or seemingly wild text.

[¶3] But, of course, responsible preachers will be careful not to take a hard passage as an opportunity to merely show off their wit and mental gymnastics in a stand-up performance, which Buttrick 1994b, 11, 12, cautions against. Bonhoeffer 1975, 179, proposes the following question for evaluating a preached sermon: “Did the religious virtuoso speak, or the one who is dedicated to the cause of Christ?” Brooks 1989, 32-33, warns against choosing strange or obscure texts and the danger of doing so to exhibit one’s cleverness and resourcefulness, and advises going with the simplest texts. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 19, 150-151, are correct in warning against preaching on an obscure or difficult passage if one cannot use it for instruction, edification and proclamation of the gospel, but wrong to assert that obscure texts should not be preached. Craddock 2011, 117-126, avers that hard texts or hard sayings should be preached in a way that gets a nod of recognition rather than the shock of destruction or utter confusion. On the other hand he suggests, 127-136, that messages that should evoke a “shock of recognition” will be best received if preached directly from the Bible and in the familiar setting of the usual order of worship, that is, the shock of recognition should come in the context of an affirmative nod of recognition (also cited in Book I, Chapter III [¶ 44]). Buttrick 1987, 381-387, gives a good demonstration of developing a sermon from a hard passage after having demurred, 374, on being ready to preach from any and all hard passages. What Buttrick has well said and written about the Bible on various occasions, for example 1987, 248-249, can also be said about this or any lectionary: (paraphrased) it is a gift to be accepted and used in freedom and responsibility with appreciation, not a god or a tyrant that confines and requires one to ignore the larger scope and history of the biblical saga, Christian theology and present experience, and so distort the good news (my paraphrase based partly on the 1987 text and partly on my memory of a Buttrick lecture at a seminar in 1992). So, if the time and situation are not right to preach from a certain scheduled hard passage, the use of that passage can be postponed to a more favorable time and situation, a useful maneuver when used responsibly in faith, notwithstanding that it is also favored by the Satan (Luke 4:13). On the other hand, Doan 1980, 104, notes that preaching from lectionary texts provides preachers with a platform of support when it comes to preaching from a hard text that needs to be preached because it is in the Bible, and also provides a structure and a readiness when a church or public issue arises and she has preached on a related hard text recently because it was appointed in the lectionary. N. T. Wright 1992, 21, cautions that there is a blatant subjectivism (and inner canon) in the surprisingly durable dictum that the harder passages may be interpreted by the easier one.

18. [¶1] Haroutunion 1991, 241-242, notes that the readings from both Old and New Testaments are essential to the worship of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, especially since it is worship of the triune God that distinguishes Christian worship from that of the other

monotheistic Abrahamic faiths, i.e., Judaism and Islam. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 16-17, in his chapter “The Church’s Need of the Old Testament,” notes that the neglect of the Old Testament in the church’s worship, mission, and teaching at various times and places in Christian history represents nothing less than a revival of Marcionism. That is, the New Testament gospel rather than being interpreted as a fulfillment of the faith of the Old Testament is interpreted as the fulfillment of the best idealism in existence among the heathen. The 3-year lectionaries have adduced the theme of promise and fulfillment in selecting Old Testament lections to accompany principal readings from a Gospel, and there has been some criticism of undue narrowness or directness in the application of that principle, that is, almost emulating the style of the Gospel of Matthew, as in “this was done to fulfill the prophecy...” Johnson 1999, 65, notes that the Qumran community, of the Essene Jewish sect that existed before, during, and after the time of Jesus and the apostles, until it was wiped out by the Roman devastations of 68-70 C. E., source of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the Judean desert between 1947 and 1956, had in common with Christianity that it, the Qumran community, interpreted Old Testament prophecy as fulfilled in its life as a religious community. Johnson, 147, observes that for the disciples of Jesus and the earliest church following the death and resurrection of Jesus and the Pentecost event that followed, the messianic expectations as held in the popular Jewish imagination in the symbolic world of Torah had to be reassessed by searching the scriptures since the premature death of messiah was not part of that popular vision. West 1997, 49, notes that in the ritual readings of scripture, the progress from prophecy to gospel is understood in certain liturgical documents proceeding from the Vatican II Ecumenical Council (1962-1965) to be a reflection of the progression of the history of salvation. Maxwell 1949, 38, notes that in the East the number of lections was reduced and became fixed after the Fourth Century in most centers with the Old Testament, Acts, and Revelation only being read at certain seasons, so that only the Armenian liturgy has an Old Testament lection as a constant along with the Epistle and the Gospel readings. Curious note: Professor Joseph Haroutunian, referenced at the head this note as insisting on both Old and New Testament lectins as a distinguishing feature in Christian worship, was of Armenian lineage but was a Protestant rather than Eastern Orthodox. Maxwell also notes, 58, that in the West the Old Testament lections find a place in the time of Gregory the Great (6th Century), having previously disappeared from the Roman rite during the 5th Century, except during Holy Week. West 1997, 188 (n. 6), reports a suggestion by Old 1984, 57-85, and 1984, 1-7, of “interpreting scripture by scripture through the selection of a supporting reading from the opposite Testament.” On the other hand, if the reading from the opposite Testament is not used in the sermon for interpreting the principal lection, the public reading of it can be a source of confusion and distraction to both preacher and congregation, as Sundberg 1990, 14-15, has noted. Sundberg, a teacher in a seminary of the Evangelical (Lutheran) tradition, recalls his own training in a seminary of the Reform (Calvinist) tradition where there were frequent reminders of

John Calvin's preference for only one text in a worship service, the one to be interpreted in preaching. Boehringer 1990, 31, discusses how liturgical readings that are not to be addressed in the sermon can lead to confusion in regard to currently sensitive issues. He also notes that it is impossible to make lectionary selections "politically correct" in a fast-changing world, which, of course, highlights the importance of interpreting in the sermon what is to be read in the worship service, while always taking account of the original historical/cultural setting of the text and that of the here and now.

[¶2] Epistle readings have not been provided as suggested lections to accompany the principal Gospel lections in the sixteen half years of *The Open Bible Lectionary*. I seriously question the wisdom and feasibility of regularly incorporating a full quire of appointed readings—Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel—in a Sunday morning worship service that is to include strong preaching from a principal reading. As Sundberg 1990, 14-15, 18-19, pointed out, it can be very disconcerting and distracting to attend a worship service in which one or more of the lections that raises questions or presents problems is simply read and left in the dust of the exposition of a primary text. He laments the confusion and lack of focus in a worship service in which three disparate texts are read. I do favor the regular incorporation of Psalm, Old Testament, and New Testament, and I agree with the liturgical consensus that the Psalm should not be treated as a reading but should be sung as prayer and praise by the congregation. But it seems to me that readings from the Testament other than that of the principal reading may best be selected by the preaching worship leader during sermon preparation. The pre-appointment of companion readings tends to short-circuit the preacher's thorough exegetical work on the principal reading and can have a distorting effect on the sermon in development. However, for the assistance of preachers and worship planners who desire to have the full complement of four Scripture passages, a "Guide for Selecting Epistle Lections as Second Readings" has been provided also referenced in Item 9 of "Features" in the Book II Introduction. The pairing of Epistle lections with principal Gospel readings does not, in my view, have the strong logic that adheres to the pairing of Old Testament readings with New Testament lections. The Epistles are our earliest "Gospels." Johnson 1999, 160, credits Mark (1:1) with enlarging the word gospel to mean not only a message in discursive/propositional form as in the Epistles but also a narrative account of the life, death, and resurrection of the savior as in the Gospels (also cited in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 27] and in Book I, Chapter III [¶ 11]). The association of the word gospel with narrative or historical/faith history is well established in Christian literature, hymnody, and theology. But pairing discursive gospel selections from the Epistles with principal or control lections from one of the four Gospels can tend to exacerbate the false popular impression that the Epistles are later texts, partly because of their order in our Bibles, that are a kind of midrash or commentary on the supposedly more primitive Gospels and are needed in the worship service to help interpret the Gospel lection. Such a view and use of the Epistles is inconsistent with the fact

that they are generally earlier writings than the Gospels. (I have referenced several perspectives on the meaning of midrash in Book I, Chapter III.) I think it is more responsible, rather than always have an Epistle lection as a companion to the principal Gospel lection, to leave it open for preachers to refer to Epistle passages in their sermons on Gospel texts when their sermon development work leads them to do so. Or the preacher might select, during the process of sermon preparation, an Epistle lection to be read as a complement to the principal reading from a Gospel, just as the synagogue leader in post-exilic Israel, according to Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 13, might select a reading from the Prophets or the writings to accompany the principal reading from the 3-year (pentateuchal) Torah lectionary (also cited below in n. 19 [¶1.1]). I have discussed in Book I, Chapter I, “Canon and Communal Faith History” the high honor given to the Gospels among the new writings in the early Christian church by Origen, and the elevation of the Gospels to an even higher importance within the canon of Old and New Testaments occasioned by the development of the Gospel-centered liturgical year.

[¶3] And as to the separate value of semi-continuous liturgical reading courses from Epistles, this is not much needed when continuous Epistle courses are to furnish the principal lections for reading and preaching in the quarter of the year following Pentecost Sunday. Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 6, discuss Calvin’s concern that complicating the liturgy with scriptural readings other than the passage to be interpreted in preaching could lead the people to pay no attention to the proclamation or to come away with the wrong message. Ritschl 1963, 162, opposes the notion of trying to balance the focus of the principal text with other scripture readings, music selections or other items in the worship service, also cited in n. 10; but Ritschl does favor referencing related scripture texts *in the sermon* and selecting hymns, etc. with the principal text in view. Dix 1945, 471, discusses the retention or not of a third lection in the various regional rites of pre-Reformation Christian history both East and West. On the other hand, there is surely some truth in N. T. Wright’s 2005, 130-132, dictum that the scriptural readings in Christian worship should not be curtailed or abbreviated to the point of being “aural wallpaper” but should “be so arranged that ordinary Christian worshipers are confronted, as far as possible, with the *whole* of scripture, especially the whole of the New Testament, on a regular basis.” Yet, care must be taken that such comprehensive reading courses do not lull worship leaders into neglecting the lively preaching of the gospel from one principal or control lection of the day, which cannot be done by performing a homily that someone else wrote. *The Open Bible Lectionary* is designed with the aim of confronting ordinary Christians with the reading and interpretation of the entirety of the New Testament Gospels and much of the rest of the New Testament in worshipful reading that is interpreted in worshipful preaching in sixteen years with quite a lot of Old Testament reading and preaching and Epistle reading and preaching as well.

19. [¶1] This method of selection—harmony with the Gospel lection or with the festal

season—is important not only for the tradition of unifying the service of Word and Sacrament around the mystery of atonement and healing through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as it is proclaimed in scripture and preaching, as indicated in *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, 11, 17-18, but also for the homiletic value of recognizing and using the great intertextuality of Scripture. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition* defines intertextuality as the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text, and dates the word's usage from 1975. Langer 1993 [1942], 228, reports in a footnote what seems to be a parallel in the field of musical composition to the phenomenon and concept of intertextuality in literary texts, citing A. Gehring: “unrelated compositions will affect one another as inevitably as those which are related.” Scholes 1974, 10, does not use the word intertextuality, but he seems to suggest that the concept is integral to the method of structuralism in literature when he states that “By moving from the study of language to the study of literature, and seeking to define the principles of structuration that operate not only through individual works but through the relationships among works over the whole field of literature, structuralism has tried—and is trying—to establish for literary studies a basis that is as scientific as possible.” Intertextuality seems to be an important element in literary criticism and in the newer and slightly wild offspring of literary criticism, canonical criticism. I have further discussion of canonical criticism in Book I, Chapter I. Ricoeur 1995, 148, notes that the phenomenon of intertextuality was brought to light by the French structural school of semiotics and refers to “the work of meaning through which one text in referring to another text both displaces the other text and receives from it an extension of meaning.” On pages 149-157 he writes of how intertextuality is at work in parables, narratives within narratives or texts within texts, and, 157, how the two narratives taken together “constitute a universe of meaning in which the symbolic potentialities of one contribute, by means of their common context, to making the potentialities of another explicit.” Ricoeur 1975, 91-106, discusses the system of parables in terms of distinction between the Hebrew maschal and the parables of Greek rhetoric and in relation to the ideas of Russian formalism, stemming from the study of the “codes” of formulaic folk tales, and French structuralism, and the function of metaphor in the Gospel literature. Brueggemann 2003, 235, 268-270, and passim, seems to be writing of intertextuality without using the term. Alter 1981, 10-11, does not use the term intertextuality but notes that “With their assumption of interconnectedness, the makers of the Midrash were often as exquisitely attuned to small verbal signals of continuity and to significant lexical nuances as any ‘close reader’ of our own age.” And he gives the example of the ancient midrash connecting the story of Tamar and Judah (sexual incontinence) and the story of Potiphar’s wife and Joseph (sexual chastity). Scholes 1974, 144-146, does not use the word intertextuality in his discussion of Todorov’s procedure of reading a text, which involves discerning the system of a text and how it relates to other texts, but the word intertextuality was not very current in 1974 (also cited in Book I,

Chapter IV [¶ 32]).

[¶1.1] Black 2002, 66, has written “Obviously, the common lectionary takes as its programmatic cue scripture’s inherent intertextuality” and he adds some reservations about the sometimes “ham fisted” reading of promise and fulfillment in the pairings of Old Testament and New Testament readings, the same criticism that was generally made of the use of typology in the pairings of the original version of the *Lectionary for Mass* and of the *Common Lectionary* of 1983. This is not to suggest that the theme of promise and fulfillment present in both Old and New Testaments, or the critical theme of judgement and consequences, should be downplayed but only that a simplistic reading of the New Testament as the fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament should be used with care and restraint as a guide for liturgical and homiletic pairings. Borg 2001, 105-106, for example, discusses the importance of the theme of promise and fulfillment in the Pentateuch and the striking “relevance of that theme to all people in all times.” Boehringer 1990, 29-30, reviews some of the arguments of those who would retain the typological pairing of Old Testament readings with the Gospel lections and those who objected to such use of the Old Testament (also cited above in n. 1). But intertextuality should not be confused with typology, though the two concepts can hardly be completely exclusive of each other; and it is acknowledged that in selecting Old Testament lessons that are thematic correlates of the Gospel readings in *The Open Bible Lectionary* both principles have been at work along with free association and other literary and theological categories including those discussed by West 1997. West, 80, has a summary phrase in writing of the pairings in the Christmas cycle of the three-year lectionaries: “these typological and prophetic parallels.” And, 117-124, he discusses the Gospel and Old Testament pairings in Ordinary Time of the three-year lectionaries in which he expresses dependence upon the work of Ramshaw 1990 and Stookey 1992. And, 120 ff., he discusses the use of three literary categories reflected in the Gospel/Old Testament pairings of the *Lectionary for Mass* and how these pairings relate to certain theological categories. *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992, 16-18, 77-78, discusses exegetical and theological problems with a typological use of the Old Testament. Nelson 1982 discusses a number of problems and possibilities presented by the variety of principles used in pairing lectionary readings. Sloyan 1976 and 1977 discusses the hermeneutical pitfalls and opportunities involved in pairing selections from the Old Testament with Gospel and other New Testament readings, including the possible impact on contemporary relations and understandings between Christians and Jews. Lowry 1992, 20-23, notes that in many cases the connection between the secondary readings (Old Testament and Epistle) and the primary or controlling lection (Gospel) in *The Revised Common Lectionary* are rather superficial and seem calculated to make the texts of the day do what the lectionary writers want them to do. That’s why the Old Testament texts paired with Gospel lections in *The Open Bible Lectionary* are only *suggestions*. Preachers should always be alert to discern an opportunity to change to a more fitting Old Testament selection as

the trajectory of their developing sermon on the Gospel lection takes shape or as they discover new possible pairings in the course of general study and daily experience and conversation. As mentioned in the previous note [¶2], such a local option was apparently the norm with the 3-year lectionary of readings from the pentateuchal Torah in post-exilic Israel where synagogue leaders might choose readings from the Prophets or the writings to complement the principal pentateuchal Torah readings, according to Rice and Huffstutler 2001, 13. Bonneau 1998, 135, notes that for the festal seasons the principle used in selecting Old Testament readings is usually that of harmony with the themes of the season rather than any specific connection or correlation with the Gospel text of the day. Sloyan 2000 gives a more positive interpretation of the typological principles at work in the development of the lectionaries.

[¶1.2] The use of typology in the pairing of lectionary readings stems in large part from two facts: first, that there are clear and overt examples of the use of typology in the biblical writings themselves and, second, that typology was used extensively, along with allegory, in scripture interpretation and preaching in the early church. And it must be acknowledged that if typology was at work in the pairing of lectionary texts, then typology is likely to be used in the interpretation of texts in preaching. G. Ernest Wright 1952, 61, highlights a distinction between typology and allegory, citing J. Gerhard 1762 as quoted by Leonhard Goppelt 1939, 8: “Typology consists in the comparison of facts (e.g., historical actions or events from different periods). Allegory is not so much concerned in facts as in their assembly, from which it draws out useful and hidden doctrines” (Wright’s translation from the Latin of Gerhard). And Wright goes on:

In other words, typology when rightly understood and used takes historical data seriously; persons, acts and events possess a typological meaning when they are understood to have been fixed or directed by God so that they point toward the future. They possess their own original historical significance, but the eye of faith can discern that God has also set them as previews or types which point to greater and more complete facts. Allegory, on the other hand, is not primarily concerned with history but with the hidden spiritual double meaning which its user believes he can draw out from the words or events. When allegory is used, all parts of Scripture are made to say the same thing and the significance of history is set aside. Typology has also been used in this manner so that it has become a mere branch of allegory. Yet in its proper sense it does not falsify history, but it deals with that peculiar characteristic of Biblical history in which significant events point beyond themselves to their fulfillment. They are thus types of the greater events which fulfil them.

Professor Wright, 65 ff., goes on at some length about the uses and dangers or pitfalls of using typology as a control guide to the unity of the Bible when interpreting the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. He considers various possible scenarios in creative typological interpretation. For example, when it comes to the New Testament references to events in the history of God’s dealings with Israel in interpreting what God has done in Christ, Wright, 69-70,

observes that the New Testament's references to the Old Testament are mainly to the period from Abraham to David while the period of the conquest of Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylon and the witness of the prophets, that is, the theme of defeat and hope of restoration, is largely ignored as an obvious type of what God had done in the cross and resurrection. That omission may be connected in part with a shift in Israel's vision from the expectation of a divinely led Israel in the restoration of its political fortunes to the eschatological vision of a fulfillment described in apocalyptic terms, along with a parallel focus on the adherence to God's law in the lives of God's people, a shift triggered in part by Israel's political and military miscalculations, with the failure of Zerubbabel to become the Messiah of God being perhaps the final straw. That is, 69,

Prophecy as the direct interpretation of God's work in historical events died out, being replaced by apocalyptic writers, on the one hand, and specialists in the law, on the other. The New Testament cuts in behind this situation and adheres directly to the prophetic promise of the new age, though employing apocalyptic materials in so doing.

Professor Wright's advice about the use of typology in Scripture interpretation in the present times is as follows, 66:

For these reasons, typology is a dangerous exercise when elaborated systematically by any modern. It is better, therefore, that we remain confined to, and disciplined by, the chief types which the New Testament itself employs, and further that we no more attempt to use these types as material for the erection of a systematic hermeneutics than did the writers of the New Testament.

Such was the attitude of the Protestant scholars who objected to the extensive use of typological interpretation in the pairing of readings in *Lectionary for Mass* and in the early editions of a *Common Lectionary*.

[¶1.3] Alsup 1992 provides a more comprehensive and detailed overview of the uses of typology in the Bible and in the history of biblical interpretation under the following headings: A. Definitions, B. Biblical Focus, C. Origins and Patristic Development, D. History of Interpretation, and E. Contemporary Discussion. Alsup studied under and worked with Leonhard Goppelt, cited above by G. Ernest Wright, from 1966 until Goppelt's death in 1973 and continued at the newly established Evangelical Faculty of the University of Munich until 1975, according to a colleague of that time, Martin Karrer 2015, 13-16. Alsup's article in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume VI* is of course loaded with data from the Bible and the history of interpretation and contemporary scholarly discussion. But most useful for gaining a sound biblical and theological perspective are (1) his opening gambit based on the "veil" of Moses in 2 Cor. 3:14-16 in section A. Definitions, and (2) his closing remarks in the final paragraph of section E. Contemporary Discussion. (1) Regarding the "veil," Alsup wrote:

This starting point presupposes the unity of the OT and NT and that the active involvement of God to save and deliver people in history is consistent. It presupposes,

therefore that the meaning of the OT is finally unclear without the NT, as is that of the NT without the OT; the two Testaments are connected as a substantive level. The Pauline image of the removal of the “veil” finds its antecedent subject matter in typology.

(2) The concluding paragraph under E. Contemporary Discussion is:

For the most part, typological thinkers insist on the personal, present reality of God in the “historical antecedents” of type determination: types *are* types because God put them there toward the end of an unfolding of God’s very person (typology’s fixed point is the gospel). It is acknowledged that this is not self-evident to any observer; it is hidden and cannot be documented as a demonstrable datum; it has to do ultimately with faith in Christ and faith’s posture toward the sovereignty of God. It will do little good for “liberals” and “fundamentalists” to fault one another for the other’s perceptions in this area. Typological thinking cares about the unity of the Christian Bible and is serious about understanding the saving activity of God to which it bears witness; all who care and all who are serious about these matters—perhaps even the Jewish-Christian dialogue—will find typological understanding helpful if it can be directed toward subject matter about which people of today are deeply concerned. It is in connection with these related lines of questioning, and not as a topic in and of itself, that typology may very well enjoy fresh consideration.

Alsop provides an extensive bibliography on typology. Wilson 2007, 253-256, has a useful discussion of bringing the Bible as a whole to the selected or scheduled text in sermon preparation, including careful use of intertextual and typological connections.

[¶1.4] Preachers and liturgy committees in most denominations have freedom to change the Old Testament selection to one which they think relates better to the Gospel reading, the community situation, or the themes of the season, and they should do so when and as the Spirit moves them, for the better edification of all the people. Any person or group using *this* lectionary clearly has that much freedom and more! On the other hand, as I mention in the introduction to Example Liturgical Prayers Keyed to the Gospel Lections (Years 1-4), Skudlarek 1981, 102, rightly notes that the effort to unify the elements of the Lord's Day service around a controlling theme extracted from the principal lection of the day can be overdone to the point of violating the basic nature of the worship service as an encounter with a person and an event rather than a "head trip" around a theme.

[¶2] Another problem with this proposed approach, that is, the approach of limiting the number of readings in the service to a Psalm, a principal reading, and a complementary reading from the other Testament, is that it sacrifices much of the liturgical reading in narrative cycles and partial book courses which *The Revised Common Lectionary* 1992 supplies in its Old Testament selections, especially during the Sundays after Pentecost, as described in the Introduction under “Use of the Old Testament” 16, 17. But this lack would be partly remedied by reading in course (continuous) from books of the Old Testament during the fall months when they are also to be expounded in preaching and would be the principal or control reading of the worship service. Perhaps a larger and more important problem is the question of whether it is

realistic to expect that continuous Sunday to Sunday readings from books of the Bible, readings that are not the principal ones to be expounded in preaching, can have the desired cumulative effect and impact on the people in congregations given the time gap of six days between reading sessions. Wiéner, 1991, 12, asks, “Does one remember something from one week to the next, and *a fortiori* over a long series of weeks?” Buttrick 1987, 345, notes in another context, “language is fleeting, particularly in oral reading of written prose language.” Phifer 1965, 141-142, seriously questions the practice of the liturgical reading without interpretive comment of passages that are obviously problematic in a modern context, also cited in the Book II Introduction [§ a. 5.]. An “exhibit A” of Phifer’s reservation might be Langford’s 1993, 46, report that the rape of Tamar, 2 Samuel 13, was excluded from *The Revised Common Lectionary* out of deference to the Roman Catholic tradition of not preaching on Old Testament passages (when the Roman church was still tentatively on board with the development of the *Revised Common Lectionary*) and a general sense that such a text should not be read in the Sunday worship service if it is not to be discussed in preaching or teaching, which I have also referenced in the Book II Introduction [§ c. 5.]. Ritschl 1963, 88-90, opposes the idea that “liturgy” and scripture *reading* are more objective and more dependably valid than preaching. Even though Ritschl 1963, 145, asserts that there is proclamation or a sermon behind every passage in the Old and the New Testaments, and Buttrick 1987, 98, writes that much of scripture is preaching, many of us who have been nurtured in the “Protestant liturgical paradigm” (West) cannot readily adopt the usage in the “Catholic liturgical paradigm” of referring to the oral *reading* of the Gospel lection in the worship service as the *proclamation* of the Gospel. Maxwell 1949, 16, indicates that this attitude dates to the third century, “The people stood for the Gospel as if hearing a proclamation from their king,” also cited in Phifer 1965, 33. Yet to say that the person reading the Gospel lection is proclaiming the gospel is inaccurate. Even at community Thanksgiving Day observances, if someone other than the mayor or governor or president reads out that person’s Proclamation of a Day of Thanksgiving, we do not say that the reader is proclaiming it. So, the Gospel lection may be a proclamation of the gospel, but the reader is not proclaiming it. The reader is *reading* a proclamation. God is the proclaimer in the reading of the Gospel text from the written word. Moreover, if reading the Gospel lection in public worship is proclamation, then must we admit that a public reading of a “canned” homily or delivering a “sermon” developed from a study of “lectionary aids” or “sermon helps,” or adapting someone else’s sermon manuscript, outline, or audio recording is preaching? *Mé genoito!* Let it not be so! But, from another angle, Barth 1991, 45-46, makes a theological case that church preaching is more accurately referred to as an attempt to announce the proclamation of God that is recorded in scripture than as the preacher’s or the church’s proclamation. Yet, 50, he does allow that the preaching may be *kerygma*, proclamation, if the preacher has been drawn into the event of God’s self-revelation such that he or she becomes a herald who is commissioned to make the

proclamation out of that relationship with God (cited also in Book I, Chapter IV [¶ 17] where there is a reference to Ronald Allen's notion of preaching and sermon preparation as conversation).

[¶3] The matter of assuming or trying to awaken in the congregation a sense of week to week connection and continuity in the scripture readings is a significant question not only when continuous passages that are not those to be expounded in preaching are read in public worship, but also when the passages for preaching, i.e., the principal or control readings of the service, are continuous or semi-continuous readings from a book of the Bible – *lectio continua de scriptura*. It is good that preachers strive to make each sermon stand alone so as to avoid the pedantry of too much linkage with last week's sermon. The sermon opener is not a good time to get people on board by saying "Previously in this series..." or "We have been walking through the book of..." or "Last week we discussed . . ." What a turn-off for visitors, sporadic attendees, and those of us who can't remember last week in any case! Each one of those pedantic openers tells the congregation to get ready for another interesting Bible lecture presented in lieu of preaching a sermon. Yet, if it were a television series with a connected story line we would welcome a brief review of scenes from previous episodes and might gladly be brought up to date if we had missed a segment or two. I mentioned in Book I, Chapter III [¶67] that a similar effect can be accomplished in Sunday worship if done as a brief introduction or lead-in (incipit) to the reading of the principal text rather than as the introductory part of the sermon. The same is true of any remarks that the preacher wants to make about thrashing, scrambling, and wrestling in the process of deciding what text or topic to preach on or how to handle the text or topic at hand. Such disclosures could be relevant and could serve a purpose in the body of the sermon or as an incipit to the reading of the text; but as a sermon opener are most likely to be a distraction and a waste of precious sermon time and attention and not likely to be effective in the worthy goal of helping the congregation to feel included in the process of sermon development. It must be acknowledged, however, that devising a helpful and much needed introduction to the reading of the principal text in a continuous series from one of the historical or ritual law or apocalyptic sections of the Bible calls for some serious study and resourcefulness. It is not simply a matter of reminding or informing the congregation of where we are in the series but may require a recapitulation of the historical setting and literary genre of the section of scripture in a manner that is not simply repetitive but uses new similes to connect the history and literary type with something in contemporary experience. It is true that some of us are comfortable with reading a text in public worship "just because it's in the Bible." But not everyone in the congregation is prepared to climb a mountain "just because it's there." And it is true that the sermon itself must take into account the literary genre and the historical setting of the text and connect these with the situation of the congregation; and the introduction to the public reading of the text must be kept as brief as possible. This requires thoughtful work! I have known only one lay or ordained

reader who voluntarily studied to provide a useful introduction to the reading, but he was not mainly attending to the place of the text in the continuous week to week series. It is usually best for the preacher to provide the reader with an introduction to the preaching text. Whether the principal text is to be introduced and read by the preacher or by another reader, the quality and skill of that public reading is important, as Wilson 2007, 204-206, explains. My seminary was one of those alluded to by Wilson, that “had full time instructors of public speaking.” Our speech and drama professional worked in tandem with the professors of homiletic theology. There was much improvement to be gained from his feedback on both our reading and our preaching, and from the book on public reading that he recommended, Lamar 1949. I think that in some churches there has been a practice of providing some training for congregant readers and there is probably literature to be found via the Internet. Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 102, mention a custom among some German preachers of providing an introduction before announcing the assigned preaching pericope. Barth 1991, 121-125, disparages extraneous, attention-getting sermon introductions but allows for analysis of the text in its setting if given between the reading and the sermon. But I think that such analysis when not part of the sermon is much more helpful when used to set the scene before the public reading of the text so that the reading intervenes between the analysis and the sermon. Horace T. Allen 1996, 12-13, discusses the use of a brief lead-in (incipit) to the reading of each lection with a strict focus on textual context. And Ronald Allen 1996, 183 (and n. 28, p. 187) asserts that “the preacher ought to help the congregation locate the text in the larger biblical, historical, cultural, and theological realms,” and observes in the note “If it would be awkward to provide such orientation in the sermon itself, the preacher” (or reader) “could bring it in a brief teaching moment at the time of the scripture reading...” Haddon Robinson 2001, 174, writes about the usefulness of introducing the reading of the principal text, but in the context of a liturgical tradition in which the reading of the text may be within the sermon and at some point after the opening gambit of the sermon.

[¶3.1] Here, in the introduction to the public reading of the preaching text, is a good place to cultivate the sense of communal narrative. Killinger 1996, 36, has an interesting view of story preaching that connects with the stories of the hearers and tells the story of the preacher while setting forth *The Story*, i.e., the Story of God and God’s people. If the sermon is to be an exposition of one passage of Scripture rather than a stitching together of various Scriptural narratives, much as the biblical writers stitched together divergent source narratives, according to the multiple document hypotheses of modern historical criticism, as noted by Alter 1981, 132, then perhaps it would be edifying to do some narrative stitching from week to week by way of a brief and connective introduction to the continuous or semi-continuous reading for the day, but not as part of the sermon. Yet, when it comes to the sermon, there is a narrative stitching that some have proposed for contemporary sermons in recent narrative preaching literature as mentioned by Richard Jensen in a seminar and as reflected in his 1993 book, 24, where he notes

the effectiveness of Garrison Keillor's episodic storytelling in the "News from Lake Wobegon" segment of the National Public Radio program *Prairie Home Companion*. While transitions or connective signals may not be needed when two or more stories are "stitched" in a narrative styled sermon presentation, as indicated in Lowry's 1985, 67-68, example of the approach used by Tex Sample, some sort of signal of continuation from last week's episode is surely in order for continuous as well as calendar themed lections. But *not as part of the sermon* - I insist! Notice the sense of communal narrative, movement in time rather than structure in place, in Thompson 1971, 49: "And according to the *de tempore* principle of Western worship, ...the presence of the Crucified Redeemer...is constantly being invigorated by the movement of the Church Year, which itself unfolds the history of redemption and leaves the church in anticipation of the climactic events of Holy Week and Easter." And just as in continuous preaching through books of the Bible, so in preaching from calendar selected texts, the sense of narrative connections from week to week should be mainly cultivated in an introduction (incipit) to the public reading of the principal scripture passage rather than in the sermon opener.

[¶3.2] Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 144-145, note the importance of illuminating the narrative itself rather than merely drawing lessons or doctrines from it when preaching an expository sermon on a narrative section of Scripture. Buttrick 1987, 285-303, acknowledges a narrative dimension in preaching by noting that all preaching involves plotting a sequence of telling (also referenced in Book I, Chapter III [¶16]) and in Book I, Chapter IV [¶58]). Lowry 1997, 55, observes that movement in sermons may be in the sequence of relating actions, ideas, images, or telling a story; and that sequence or order of arrangement is not indifferent or neutral but strategic, just as in music the order of playing or singing notes is essential to melody. The matter of what should or should not be at the beginning of a sermon is discussed in Barth 1991, 121-125; Blackwood 1946, 99-110; Bonhoeffer 1975, 157-158; Broadus and Weatherspoon 1944, 101-108; Buttrick 1987, 83-96, 309-317, 345-347; Craddock 1983, 62, 146-147, 156; Davis 1958, 191; Long 2005, 171-187; Lowry 1980, 28-35, 50; Mitchell 1990, 115-116; Sherer (in Fant and Pinson 1995, X, 303); Stewart (in Fant and Pinson 1995, XI, 188); and Wilson 2007, 136-139. The nature of the sermon's opening gambit, whether or not one agrees with Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Davis that a "formal" introduction is likely to be a superfluous diversion, should be designed according to the homiletic strategy adopted for the sermon at hand, and, as Mitchell 1990, 115-116, discusses, the cultural expectations of the congregation and the extent of the acquaintanceship and familiarity between the speaker and the audience. The sermon introduction should most definitely not be designed according to the progress of the current sermon series. Heaven forbid that one begin to preach a sermon by saying something like "We are continuing our journey through the Letter of James." This fact should have been noted as a lead-in to the reading of the Scripture text, for which the preacher may provide the reader with a suggested introduction. There really is a difference between a sermon series and a Bible lecture series!

[¶4] A separate question in my mind is whether much emphasis on the liturgical reading of Scripture lessons not specifically related to the principal text may sometimes tend to detract from the thematic thread of the worship service related to the text to be expounded in preaching. If music, prayers and other liturgical texts are to be selected or composed with a view toward harmony with possible themes of the control Scripture reading, why blur that vision with lessons from other parts of scripture that are not thematically, typologically, or intertextually related to the control reading of the day, whether it be a Gospel, Epistle, or Old Testament selection? Such readings might fill a need in the still highly selective as to canonical coverage and minimal in span of years three-year lectionaries, but hardly seem helpful in this much more comprehensive in coverage of the canonical text lectionary of sixteen years and more. “Much more comprehensive” refers to the fact that successive rounds of the sixteen-year cycle can encompass summer and fall principal readings from Epistles and Old Testament that were not treated in previous rounds. Thus, in this lectionary, the principle of having a reading from the other Testament that is related to or in harmony with the principal lection is supported. But the principle of having a reading from the Epistles to accompany a principal reading from the Gospels and vice-versa, is not. And neither is the practice of including liturgical reading courses from Sunday to Sunday from parts of the Bible other than the principal lection course, whether calendar or continuous.

20. [¶1] This note is indicated in Chapter I “Gospel Lectionary in Sixteen Half-Years” bottom margins at Years 4, 8, and 12 and in Chapter II. b. “Discussion of Lectionary Arrangement by Seasons” at Advent 3, Year 12; Christmas 2, Year 12; Baptism/Epiphany 4-9, Year 4; Baptism/Epiphany 5 and 6, Year 8; Baptism/Epiphany 4 and 6, Year 12; Lent 2, Year 12; and Easter 6, Year 12. These are the places where this lectionary follows Bultmann’s 1971 rearrangement of the text of the Gospel of John. Bultmann’s thematic arrangement is adopted here because it is useful liturgically and homiletically. It does not require a wholesale endorsement of Bultmann’s approach to the text. But the use of this arrangement does create some pressure for the interpreter to consult Bultmann 1971, which is not a bad thing. As with any scripture commentary Bultmann’s *The Gospel of John* should be consulted along with at least two other commentaries of comparable or greater academic stature. In the case of Bultmann, a commentator of comparable stature might be possible to find but not one of greater stature. Bultmann’s treatment of the text leads to the question: Were the writer of the Gospel of John and Rudolph Bultmann unduly influenced by Hellenic/Gnostic thinking to the detriment of the gospel message, or did they use Hellenic/Gnostic categories to effectively communicate the gospel to people, both ancient and modern, of a Gnostic mind or of a Greek philosophical bent? Or is it none of the above? (Addressing these questions to the writers of the gnostic gospels in the Nag Hammadi Library is a separate matter that I have discussed in Book I, Chapter I [¶]s

3,4,5,6] and Chapter III [¶s 93, 94, 95].) Johnson's 1999, 525-528, discussion of the symbolic world projected by the Fourth Gospel as constructed of both Hellenic elements (including gnosis-isms) and Hebraic elements (including Torah-isms, Palestinian-Jewish-isms, and Jesus-isms) suggests to me that John and Bultmann were both about interpreting the gospel story of Jesus rather than about emending it or transforming it. Walter Schmithals, in his Introduction to Bultmann's *The Gospel of John* 1971, 7-9, makes a strong case that John, and implicitly Bultmann, uses the dualistic—good/evil, angels/demons—form and style and language of Gnosticism to express a pointed anti-Gnostic theology. Thus, if we recognize the dualistic spiritual cosmology of Gnosticism as being mythological we may see Bultmann's commentary on John's Gospel as being part of his program of demythologization. On the other hand, the message that the Gospel writer presents as an alternative spiritual cosmology and redemptive process to that of Gnosticism, a *divine Redeemer become flesh* who reveals to humankind our sinfulness and a dualism of decision for faith or unbelief may also be seen by some moderns (including Bultmann?) as mythological. Allen and Springsted 2007, xv ff, develop the idea that modern Western culture and thought are deeply infused with Hellenic culture and that Greek philosophy is one of the two main sources of Christian theology along with the Bible, also cited in Book I, Chapter I. N. T. Wright 1999, 161, has a provocative metaphor that seems most appropriate to both the Gospel of John and the commentary of Rudolph Bultmann: "However much the spreading branches of Johannine theology might hang over the wall, offering fruit to the pagan world around, the roots of the tree are firmly embedded in Jewish soil." And Johnson 1999, 527, makes a similar observation about the mixed findings of modern scholars regarding the multiple sources of the symbolic system of John's Gospel and notes that three aspects have been made clear:

First, all elements of John's symbolic structure are present and important in the Judaism of first-century Palestine. Second, no less than in other New Testament writings, the symbols of Torah play a critical role. Third, the symbols are given their coherence by the figure of Jesus. Surely the roots of Bultmann's theology are also "firmly embedded in Christian soil."

[¶2] Further, it is not only the Gospel of John in the Bible that reflects a Gnostic, dualistic spiritual cosmology; there are also the principalities and powers as referenced in Ephesians and Colossians, including passages which underlie the "Christus Victor" view of atonement, described in Aulén 1960: Christ crucified descended to the nether realm and there defeated the spiritual powers of darkness, a victory indicated by his triumphant resurrection; variously interpreted sometimes with the incarnation—Christ's birth—being the descent rather than post crucifixion, and life on earth being the nether realm, i.e., "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" 2 Cor. 5:19—which, according to Bultmann 1957, 54-55, is a piece of Gnostic thinking about a partially realized eschatology, that is, "although there is to be an end to the world, the decisive event has already happened in that the heavenly Savior came into this world and then left it and so prepared a way to the heavenly world of light for his adherents." Barth

1991 who, 51-55, asserts a between-the-times experiential eschatology (which he says “is none other than Christology”) that places us and our preaching between the first advent and the second, which may also include a partially realized or a being realized eschatology, a continuing or again-and-again revelation that in no way contradicts the once-for-all Christ event or the promised coming again, indicated in his, 109-110, explanation of the confusion of tenses in Ephesians 2:1-10: we recognize that the sin which held us in spiritual death in the past still impinges on our present new resurrection life in the present, yet “In the church of Christ...we do not look upon the serpent whose fierce bites wound us again-and-again but on the serpent which is lifted up and a glance at which brings healing to every wound” (also noted, in part, in Book I, Chapter II [¶ 19] where I also discuss Bultmann’s view of a continual, again-and-again, experience of the fulfilled eternal presence as distinct from a continuous or continuing experience). The preacher/reader may be assisted in thrashing her or his way through these weeds by Borg’s 2003, 171-184, highly accessible discussion of “Salvation in This Life” and “Salvation and the Afterlife.” I think James Robinson 1990, 26, was on target when he wrote that Rudolph Bultmann “reinterpreted the New Testament in terms of an interaction with Gnosticism involving appropriation as well as confrontation.”

[¶3] As to Hellenization of the gospel, we should first take note that while Jesus and his fellow Palestinian Jews conversed in Aramaic, a Syrian language adopted/adapted by the Jews after the Babylonian exile, the fact that the books of the New Testament were written in the Greek language reminds us that Hellenization had already spread deeply all around the Mediterranean world *before the time of Jesus*. Alexander “the Great” (356-323 B.C.E.) began in Macedonia, consolidated power in all of Greece, and led the main expansion of the Greek empire, culture, and language across the Mediterranean world. As mentioned in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 5], the military/political aspect of that history is summed up in the Apocrypha in the first chapter of The First Book of The Maccabees. Thus, the Greek language and worldview had made some impact on most of the religions and cultures of the Mediterranean world including Judaism before the time of Jesus. And we must note that *gnostic* ways of thinking were to some extent part and parcel of the Greek worldview and had influenced the various cultures and religions of the world and not just some of the minority expressions of Christianity such as those memorialized in the gnostic Christian writings that came to light in the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi library. Bultmann 1957, 147, in a discussion of Christian faith and history, worldviews and self-understanding, makes this simple observation: “In connection with Gnosticism, and at the same time in opposition to it, Christianity arose.” As mentioned in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 5], Vermes 2004, 88, cites Josephus in discussing the common thread of Hellenic Gnosticism that runs through both the Essene Jewish community of Dead Sea Scrolls fame and the Coptic Christian community of Nag Hammadi library fame. Western civilization and culture as we know and celebrate and are part of it today is surely a descendant of the ancient Greek

worldview, including a strong tendency to think in some aspects of gnostic ways. The influence of the Greek cosmos conviction persisting in modern/postmodern Christian teaching can be seen clearly in Tillich's 1957, 29-44, casting of the Fall—exit from the garden—as the transition from essence to existence. And as to the gnosis or special knowledge that will help one get back a little closer to the potential essence of life rather than settle for mere actual existence: isn't every self-help book a vestigial expression of a gnostic-like way of thinking? Just master these key practices or adopt these productive habits and ways of thinking and you will be successful in business or win friends and influence people or live a fulfilled life! Classic Gnosticism was not as optimistic about the possibility of self-fulfillment in this material world and life as the modern self-help gurus or the prosperity gospel preachers, but rather focused narrowly on that part of the Platonic cosmology which expected fulfillment only when the secret knowledge led to their transition or translation back to the essential world from this accidental spin-off world. But as Allen and Springsted 2007, 4, note, their failure to acknowledge any residual goodness or beauty in the material world of existence was a point of divergence from Plato's vision (also cited in Book I, Chapter I [¶ 6]). Homiletically speaking, Keller 2015, 93-120, in a chapter on "Preaching Christ to the Culture" has a section, 96-99, "Adapting in Order to Confront" in which he cites P. T. Forsyth's estimation of John's clever co-opting of the Greek/Gnostic philosophical term *logos* – using Gnostic concepts to confront and challenge Gnosticism with a personal *logos* in lieu of an abstract *logos*. Keller's point is that preachers today must find ways to adapt the language and concepts of contemporary culture for the sake of "Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism," which is the subtitle of his book. The notion that the writer of the Gospel of John used Hellenic and Gnostic categories intentionally for the purpose of communicating the work and message of Jesus more effectively to a gnosis minded audience is strengthened, I think, by Johnson's 1999, 526, observation that while the Fourth Gospel reflects a different symbolic world from that reflected in the synoptic Gospels that does not require that the Gospel of John must have been written outside of Palestine or at a much later date than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since symbolic worlds are generally moveable, i.e., not tied to time and place, and more than one symbolic world can exist at the same time and in the same place.

[¶4] Finally, regarding my use of Bultmann's rearrangements in developing three half-years of Sundays on the Gospel of John: I myself would be thrilled to see how someone had developed a comparable series of three half-years on John without moving sections of text around as Bultmann does, which surely someone could do with the help of major Johannine scholars such as C. K. Barrett, Raymond E. Brown, Gerard Sloyan, John Marsh, J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, Rudolph Schnackenburg, Edwin C. Hoskins, et. al. If that were done, I would prefer to follow that lectionary and use Bultmann's highly tendentious commentary as a supplemental reference. That is, Bultmann tends toward overdoing his recognition and acknowledgment of the Hellenizing/Gnostic influence in the language and syntax of John by

casting his own section headings in Hellenistic/Gnostic terms.

21. This note is indicated at the end of my tribute to *Bob Thayer* in “Personal Acknowledgements.” Fortunately, I did not learn until decades later that “self-expression” and “feeling of dependence on God” are both loaded terms. With regard to Schleiermacher’s notion of faith as a “feeling of dependence on God,” Bultmann 1958, 70-71, notes that Karl Barth and the dialectical theologians had revolted against the psychologizing of faith by the likes of Schleiermacher and Feuerbach. Tillich 1951, 15, asserts that Barth and other critics of Schleiermacher’s idea of a feeling of dependence have misread or misunderstood Schleiermacher’s use of the word feeling. And he asserts: “The banishment of religion into the nonrational corner of subjective emotions in order to have the realms of thought and action free from religious interference was an easy way of escaping the conflicts between religious tradition and modern thought. But this was a death sentence against religion, and religion did not and could not accept it.” Further, Tillich, 41-42, explains that “feeling” in the traditions that shaped Schleiermacher’s thinking—Augustinian-Franciscan—conveyed to Schleiermacher religiously by his Moravian education and philosophically by Spinoza and Schelling, referred not to a psychological function but to the awareness of that which transcends intellect and will, subject and object. Bultmann 1957, 95-100, makes clear that in the biblical sense of historical rather than psychological faith experience, humankind is dependent on God for salvation whether by way of obedience to both the cultic and moral laws of God in the Old Testament or by the grace of forgiveness and renewal in the New. According to the report of Fant and Pinson 1995, XII, 358-363, 371-384, Martin Luther King, Jr., reflected a historical understanding of dependence on God for the progress of humankind. King, in a sermon “The Man Who Was a Fool” Luke 12:20, rejected nontheistic humanism, communism, and the notion of inevitable human progress through science, and he announced, 360, that “Without dependence on God our efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest night.” Whether we think about a personal, spiritual or psychological sense of dependence on God or a historical societal awareness of dependence on God, it is pertinent that the theological converse of dependence on God is self-sufficiency, that is, the sin of pride. And, with regard to self-expression, Buttrick 1987, 177-179, and Keller 2015, 276, n. 5, have both noted that mere self-expression in the sense espoused in Romanticism is not a respectable aim in preaching. But I stand by the positive influence on my personal growth in Christian piety of the concept of “dependence on God” as I understood it at first meeting. And I stand by the influence of the concept of self-expression, as I understood it at first meeting, on me in my commitment to developing my own thoughts and finding my own words and my own text-to-life/then-to-now connections during the agony and ecstasy of sermon preparation.

A Classified Bibliography Of Works About The Three-Year Lectionaries

Entries here are abbreviated to author and year.

Additional publication data are provided in the General Bibliography which follows.

A. The following works were written prior to the 1983 edition of *The Common Lectionary* when several denominations and The Consultation on Church Union had produced their own variations of the Roman Order produced in 1969 pursuant to the Vatican II Council of 1963-65: Abbott 1966; H. Allen 1983a; Bailey 1976, 1977; Fuller 1974; Gonzalez and Gonsalus Gonzalez 1980; 1983; Hessel 1983; Hultgren 1979; Nelson 1982; Nocent 1977; Reumann 1977; James Sanders 1983; Sloyan 1976, 1977; *Lectionary for Mass: Introduction* (1981).

B. The following works were written after the publication of *The Common Lectionary* in 1983 and before the publication of *The Revised Common Lectionary* in 1992: H. Allen 1983b, 1991; Boehringer, 1990; Bower, 1987; Cochran 1990; *Daily Prayer* 1987; Daniels 1992a; Gray 1991; Hensell 1986; Hoffman 1991; Irwin 1991; Koester 1990; Olsen 1985; Procter-Smith 1985, 1987; Ramshaw 1990; Skudlarek 1985; Sloyan 1988, 1989; 1991; Sundberg 1990; Thistlewaite 1985; Trotter 1985; White 1989; Wiener 1991; Miriam Therese Winter 1990.

C. The following works were written after the publication of *The Revised Common Lectionary* in 1992: H. Allen 1992a,b, 1996; Black 2002; Bonneau 1998; Bower 1996; Brown 1994a,b; Butcher 2002; Buttrick 1994a,b; Daniels 1992b; Deiss 1992, 31-32; Langford 1993; Lowry 1992; McManus 1995; Procter-Smith 1993; Seitz 1995; Sensing 1995; Sloyan 2000; Stookey 1992; West 1997; Willimon 2001.

D. Other works listed in the General Bibliography do not mainly discuss the contemporary round of three-year lectionaries but are important to the concerns of canon, scriptural authority, hermeneutics, homiletics, theology, history and Christian worship that prompted the development of *The Open Bible Lectionary and Tradition–Interpretation–Proclamation – Celebration*. These are the matters that are mainly discussed in Book I and in the Book II Introduction.

General Bibliography

Sensing 2003 provides bibliographical notes on some of the homiletic works listed below and many others, and a critical discussion of what is meant by “the new homiletics.”

An extensive bibliography on lectionaries can be seen in Bower 1996, 269-273.

Johnson 1999 provides extensive bibliographic notes on biblical hermeneutics and related matters at the end of each chapter.

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Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
MATTHEW	MATTHEW	MATTHEW
Matthew 1:1-17	Year 13, Advent 3	
Matthew 1:18-25	Year 1, Advent 4	Year A, Advent 4
Matthew 2:1-12	Year 13, Baptism/Epiphany	Years ABC, Epiphany Day
Matthew 2:13-23	(See below)	Year A, Christmas 1
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-2	Year 1, Christmas 1	(See above)
Matthew 2:16-18	Year 9, Christmas 2	(See above)
Matthew 3:1-12	Year 1, Advent 2	Year A, Advent 2
Matthew 3:11-12	Year 13, Pentecost	(See above)
Matthew 3:13-17	Year 1, Baptism/Epiphany	Year A, Baptism of the Lord
Matthew 4:1-11	Year 15, Lent 1	Year A, 1 Lent
Matthew 4:12-22	Year 1, Epiphany 2	(See below)
Matthew 4:12-23	(See above and below)	Year A, Epiphany 3
Matthew 4:23-25	Year 5, Baptism/Epiphany	
Matthew 5:1-12	Year 1, Epiphany 3	Year A, Epiphany 4
Matthew 5:1-12	(See above)	Year A, All Saints, 11/1 – 11/7
Matthew 5:13-16	Year 1, Epiphany 4	(See below)
Matthew 5:13-20	(See above and below)	Year A, Epiphany 5
Matthew 5:17-26	Year 1, Epiphany 5	(See above and below)
Matthew 5:21-37	(See above and below)	Year A, Epiphany 6
Matthew 5:27-37	Year 1, Epiphany 6	(See above)
Matthew 5:38-48	Year 1, Epiphany 7	Year A, Epiphany 7
Matthew 6:1-6	Year 15, Epiphany 8	Years ABC, Ash Wednesday
Matthew 6:7-9	Year 1, Lent 1	
Matthew 6:10	Year 1, Lent 2	
Matthew 6:11	Year 1, Lent 3	
Matthew 6:12	Year 1, Lent 4	
Matthew 6:13	Year 1, Lent 5	
Matthew 6:14-15	Year 1, Palm/Passion	
Matthew 6:16-18	Year 15, Last before Lent	
Matthew 6:16-21	(See above and below)	Years ABC, Ash Wednesday
Matthew 6:19-23	Year 13, Easter 2	
Matthew 6:24-34	Year 15, Epiphany 4	Year A, Epiphany 8
Matthew 6:25-33	(See above)	Year B, Thanksgiving Day
Matthew 7:1-6	Year 13, Easter 3	
Matthew 7:7-12	Year 13, Easter 4	
Matthew 7:13-23	Year 13, Easter 5	(See below)
Matthew 7:21-29	(See above and below)	Year A, Epiphany 9 or 5/29 – 6/4

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Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
Matthew 7:24-27	Year 13, Easter 6	(See above)
Matthew 7:28-29	Year 13, Easter 7	(See above)
Matthew 8:1-4	Year 13, Epiphany 2	
Matthew 8:5-13	Year 13, Epiphany 3	
Matthew 8:14-17	Year 13, Epiphany 4	
Matthew 8:18-27	Year 13, Epiphany 5	
Matthew 8:28-34	Year 13, Epiphany 6	
Matthew 9:1-8	Year 13, Epiphany 7	
Matthew 9:9-13	Year 13, Epiphany 8	Year A, 6/5 – 6/11
Matthew 9:14-17	Year 13, Last before Lent	
Matthew 9:18-26	Year 5, Easter 2	Year A, 6/5 – 6/11
Matthew 9:27-31	Year 1, Epiphany 8	
Matthew 9:32-34	Year 9, Baptism/Epiphany	
Matthew 9:35-38	Year 9, Epiphany 2	
Matthew 9:35 – 10:23	(See above and below)	Year A, 6/12 – 6/18
Matthew 10:1-16	Year 9, Epiphany 3	(See above)
Matthew 10:17-25	Year 9, Epiphany 4	(See below)
Matthew 10:24-39	(See above and below)	Year A, 6/19 – 6/25
Matthew 10:26-33	Year 9, Epiphany 5	(See above)
Matthew 10:34-39	Year 9, Epiphany 6	(See below)
Matthew 10:40-42	(See below)	Year A, 6/26 – 7/2
Matthew 10:40 – 11:1	Year 9, Epiphany 7	(See above)
Matthew 11:2-11	Year 1, Advent 3	Year A, Advent 3
Matthew 11:12-19	Year 13, Advent 2	(See below)
Matthew 11:16-19	(See above)	Year A, 7/3 – 7/9
Matthew 11:20-24	Year 9, Epiphany 8	
Matthew 11:25-30	Year 9, Last before Lent	Year A, 7/3 – 7/9
Matthew 12:1-8	Year 9, Lent 1	
Matthew 12:9-14	Year 9, Lent 2	
Matthew 12:15-21	Year 9, Lent 3	
Matthew 12:22-30	Year 9, Lent 4	
Matthew 12:31-32	Year 9, Pentecost	
Matthew 12:33-37	Year 9, Lent 5	
Matthew 12:38-42	Year 9, Palm/Passion	
Matthew 12:43-45	Year 9, Easter	
Matthew 12:46-50	Year 13, Christmas 1	
Matthew 13:1-9	Year 9, Easter 2	Year A 7/10 – 7/16
Matthew 13:10-15	Year 9, Easter 3	

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The Open Bible Lectionary Compared With The Revised Common Lectionary

Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
Matthew 13:16-17	Year 5, Epiphany 2	
Matthew 13:18-23	Year 9, Easter 2	Year A, 7/10 – 7/16
Matthew 13:24-30	Year 9, Easter 4	Year A, 7/17 – 7/23
Matthew 13:31-33	Year 9, Easter 5	Year A, 7/24 – 7/30
Matthew 13:34-36a	Year 9, Easter 3	
Matthew 13:36b-43	Year 9, Easter 4	Year A, 7/17 – 7/23
Matthew 13:44-46	Year 9, Easter 6	(See below)
Matthew 13:44-52	(See above and below)	Year A, 7/24 – 7/30
Matthew 13:47-50	Year 9, Easter 4	(See above)
Matthew 13:51-53	Year 9, Easter 7	(See above)
Matthew 13:54-58	Year 13, Christmas 2	
Matthew 14:1-2	Year 5, Christmas 1	
Matthew 14:3-12	Year 5, Christmas 2	
Matthew 14:13-21	Year 5, Epiphany 3	Year A, 7/31 – 8/6
Matthew 14:22-33	Year 5, Epiphany 4	Year A, 8/7 – 8/13
Matthew 14:34-36	Year 5, Epiphany 5	
Matthew 15:1-20	Year 5, Epiphany 6	
Matthew 15:10-28	(See above and below)	Year A, 8/14 – 8/20
Matthew 15:21-28	Year 5, Epiphany 7	(See above)
Matthew 15:29-31	Year 5, Epiphany 8	
Matthew 15:32-39	Year 5, Last before Lent	
Matthew 16:1-4	Year 15, Advent 1	
Matthew 16:5-12	Year 15, Epiphany 5	
Matthew 16:13-20	Year 5, Advent 3	Year A, 8/21 – 8/27
Matthew 16:21-23	Year 15, Epiphany 2	(See below)
Matthew 16:21-28	(See above and below)	Year A, 8/28 – 9/3
Matthew 16:24-28	Year 15, Epiphany 3	(See above)
Matthew 17:1-9	Year 1, Last before Lent	Year A, Last before Lent
Matthew 17:1-9	(See above)	Year A, Lent 2 (Alternate)
Matthew 17:9-13	Year 9, Advent 3	
Matthew 17:14-21	Year 15, Baptism/Epiphany	
Matthew 17:22-23	Year 15, Epiphany 6	
Matthew 17:24-27	Year 15, Advent 4	
Matthew 18:1-4	Year 1, Easter 2	
Matthew 18:5-9	Year 1, Easter 3	
Matthew 18:10-14	Year 1, Easter 4	
Matthew 18:15-17	Year 1, Easter 5	(See below)
Matthew 18:15-20	(See above and below)	Year A, 9/4 – 9/10

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The Open Bible Lectionary Compared With The Revised Common Lectionary

Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
Matthew 18:18-20	Year 1, Pentecost	(See above)
Matthew 18:21-22	Year 1, Easter 6	(See below)
Matthew 18:21-35	(See above and below)	Year A, 9/11 – 9/17
Matthew 18:23-35	Year 1, Easter 7	(See above)
Matthew 19:1-12	Year 1, Christmas 2	
Matthew 19:13-15	Year 9, Christmas 1	
Matthew 19:16-22	Year 15, Lent 3	
Matthew 19:23-30	Year 15, Lent 4	
Matthew 20:1-16	Year 15, Epiphany 5	Year A, 9/18 – 9/24
Matthew 20:17-19	Year 15, Lent 2	
Matthew 20:20-28	Year 15, Christmas 1	
Matthew 20:29-34	Year 1, Epiphany 8	
Matthew 21:1-11	Year 15, Palm/Passion	Year A, Palm/Passion
Matthew 21:12-17	Year 5, Easter 3	
Matthew 21:18-22	Year 5, Easter 4	
Matthew 21:23-27	Year 15, Advent 3	
Matthew 21:23-32	(See above and below)	Year A, 9/25 – 10/1
Matthew 21:28-32	Year 15, Christmas 2	(See above)
Matthew 21:33-46	Year 5, Easter 5	Year A, 10/2 – 10/8
Matthew 22:1-14	Year 5, Advent 4	Year A, 10/9 – 10/15
Matthew 22:15-22	Year 5, Easter 6	Year A, 10/16 – 10/22
Matthew 22:23-33	Year 15, Easter	
Matthew 22:34-40	Year 15, Pentecost	(See below)
Matthew 22:34-46	(See above and below)	Year A, 10/23 – 10/29
Matthew 22:41-46	Year 13, Advent 4	(See above)
Matthew 23:1-12	Year 15, Easter 2	Year A, 10/30 – 11/5
Matthew 23:13-15	Year 15, Easter 3	
Matthew 23:16-22	Year 15, Easter 4	
Matthew 23:23-24	Year 15, Easter 5	
Matthew 23:25-28	Year 15, Easter 6	
Matthew 23:29-36	Year 15, Easter 7	
Matthew 23:37-39	Year 5, Easter 7	
Matthew 24:1-14	Year 9, Advent 1	
Matthew 24:15-28	Year 9, Advent 2	
Matthew 24:29-33	Year 5, Advent 1	
Matthew 24:34-36	Year 5, Advent 2	
Matthew 24:36-44	Year 1, Advent 1	Year A, Advent 1
Matthew 24:45-51	Year 15, Advent 2	

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Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
Matthew 25:1-13	Year 9, Advent 4	Year A, 11/6 – 11/12
Matthew 25:14-30	Year 15, Epiphany 7	Year A, 11/13 – 11/19
Matthew 25:31-46	Year 13, Advent 1	Years ABC, 1/1 (New Year's Day)
Matthew 25:31-46	(See above)	Year A, Christ the King
Matthew 26:1-16	Year 13, Lent 1	(See below)
Matthew 26:14 – 27:66	(See above and below)	Year A, Palm/Passion (Alternate)
Matthew 26:17-35	Year 13, Lent 2	(See above)
Matthew 26:36-46	Year 5, Lent 1	(See above)
Matthew 26:47-56	Year 5, Lent 2	(See above)
Matthew 26:57-68	Year 13, Lent 3	(See above)
Matthew 26:69-75	Year 5, Lent 3	(See above)
Matthew 27:1-2	Year 5, Lent 4	(See above)
Matthew 27:3-10	Year 13, Lent 4	(See above)
Matthew 27:11-14	Year 5, Lent 4	(See above)
Matthew 27:11-54	(See above and below)	Year A, Palm/Passion (Alternate)
Matthew 27:15-26	Year 5, Lent 5	(See above)
Matthew 27:27-44	Year 13, Lent 5	(See above)
Matthew 27:45-56	Year 5, Palm/Passion	(See above)
Matthew 27:57-61	Year 13, Palm/Passion	(See above)
Matthew 27:57-66	(See above and below)	Years ABC, Holy Saturday (Alt.)
Matthew 27:62-66	Year 5, Easter	(See above)
Matthew 28:1-10	Year 1, Easter	Year A, Easter Vigil
Matthew 28:1-10	(See above)	Year A, Easter (Alternate)
Matthew 28:11-15	Year 13, Easter	
Matthew 28:16-20	Year 5, Pentecost	Year A, Trinity (Pentecost 1)
MARK	MARK	MARK
Mark 1:1-8	(See below)	Year B, Advent 2
Mark 1a	Year 6, Advent 4	(See above)
Mark 1b	Year 6, Christmas 1	(See above)
Mark 1c	Year 6, Christmas 2	(See above)
Mark 1:2-5	Year 6, Advent 3	(See above and below)
Mark 1:4-11	(See above and below)	Year B, Epiphany 1
Mark 1:6-8	Year 10, Advent 3	(See above)
Mark 1:7-8	Year 2, Pentecost	(See above)
Mark 1:9-11	Year 6, Baptism/Epiphany	(See above and below)
Mark 1:9-15	(See above and below)	Year B, Lent 1
Mark 1:12-13	Year 6, Lent 1	(See above)
Mark 1:14-15	Year 6, Epiphany 3	(See below)

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Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
Mark 1:14-20	(See above and below)	Year B, Epiphany 3
Mark 1:16-20	Year 6, Epiphany 4	(See above)
Mark 1:21-28	Year 6, Epiphany 5	Year B, Epiphany 4
Mark 1:29-39	Year 6, Epiphany 7	Year B, Epiphany 5
Mark 1:40-45	Year 6, Epiphany 8	Year B, Epiphany 6
Mark 2:1-12	Year 10, Lent 5	Year B, Epiphany 7
Mark 2:13-17	Year 10, Baptism/Epiphany	(See above)
Mark 2:13-22	(See above and below)	Year B, Epiphany 8
Mark 2:18-22	Year 10, Advent 4	(See above)
Mark 2:23-28	Year 10, Epiphany 2	(See below)
Mark 2:23 – 3:6	(See above and below)	Year B, Epiphany 9 or 5/29 – 6/4
Mark 3:1-6	Year 10, Epiphany 3	(See above)
Mark 3:7-12	Year 10, Epiphany 4	
Mark 3:13-19	Year 10, Epiphany 5	
Mark 3:20-21	Year 10, Christmas 1	(See below)
Mark 3:20-35	(See above and below)	Year B, 6/5 – 6/11
Mark 3:22-30	Year 10, Epiphany 6	(See above)
Mark 3:28-30	Year 10, Pentecost	(See above)
Mark 3:31-35	Year 10, Christmas 1	Year B, 6/5 – 6/11
Mark 4:1-9	Year 6, Easter 2	
Mark 4:10-12	Year 6, Easter 3	
Mark 4:13-20	Year 6, Easter 4	
Mark 4:21-25	Year 6, Easter 5	
Mark 4:26-29	Year 6, Easter 6	(See below)
Mark 4:26-34	(See above and below)	Year B, 6/12 – 6/18
Mark 4:30-34	Year 6, Easter 7	(See above)
Mark 4:35-41	Year 10, Epiphany 7	Year B, 6/19 – 6/25
Mark 5:1-20	Year 10, Epiphany 8	
Mark 5:21-43	Year 10, Last before Lent	Year B, 6/26 – 7/2
Mark 6:1-6a	Year 10, Christmas 2	(See below)
Mark 6:1-13	(See above and below)	Year B, 7/3 – 7/9
Mark 6:6b-13	Year 2, Baptism/Epiphany	(See above)
Mark 6:14-29	Year 2, Advent 3	Year B, 7/10 – 7/16
Mark 6:30-34	(See below)	Year B, 7/17 – 7/23
Mark 6:30-44	Year 2, Epiphany 2	(See above)
Mark 6:45-52	Year 2, Epiphany 3	
Mark 6:53-56	Year 2, Epiphany 4	Year B, 7/17 – 7/23
Mark 7:1-8	(See below)	Year B, 8/28 - 9/3

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Gospel Reference	Open Bible Lectionary	Revised Common Lectionary
Mark 7:1-23	Year 2, Epiphany 5	(See below)
Mark 7:14-15	(See above)	Year B, 8/28 – 9/3
Mark 7:16-20	(See above)	
Mark 7:21-23	(See above)	Year B, 8/28 – 9/3
Mark 7:24-30	Year 2, Epiphany 6	
Mark 7:24-37	(See above and below)	Year B, 9/4 – 9/10
Mark 7:31-37	Year 2, Epiphany 7	(See above)
Mark 8:1-10	Year 10, Lent 1	
Mark 8:11-13	Year 10, Lent 2	
Mark 8:14-21	Year 10, Lent 3	
Mark 8:22-26	Year 10, Lent 4	
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Mark 14:10-11	Year 2, Lent 1	(See above)
Mark 14:12-16	Year 2, Lent 3	(See above)
Mark 14:17-21	Year 2, Lent 4	(See above)
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John 14:25-27	(See above and below)	Year C, Pentecost
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(Suggestion for a Book Cover Design - A)

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GOOD NEWS PREACHING



AND THE OPEN BIBLE LECTIONARY

CONNECTIONS – COMMUNICATION – CONTEXTUAL PRESENCE

JAMES R. CHAMBLEE, JR.